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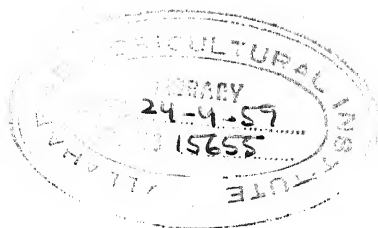
Being Vols. II. and III.
of the Vicomte de
Bragelonne Series

ALEXANDRE
DUMAS



H. M. CALDWELL
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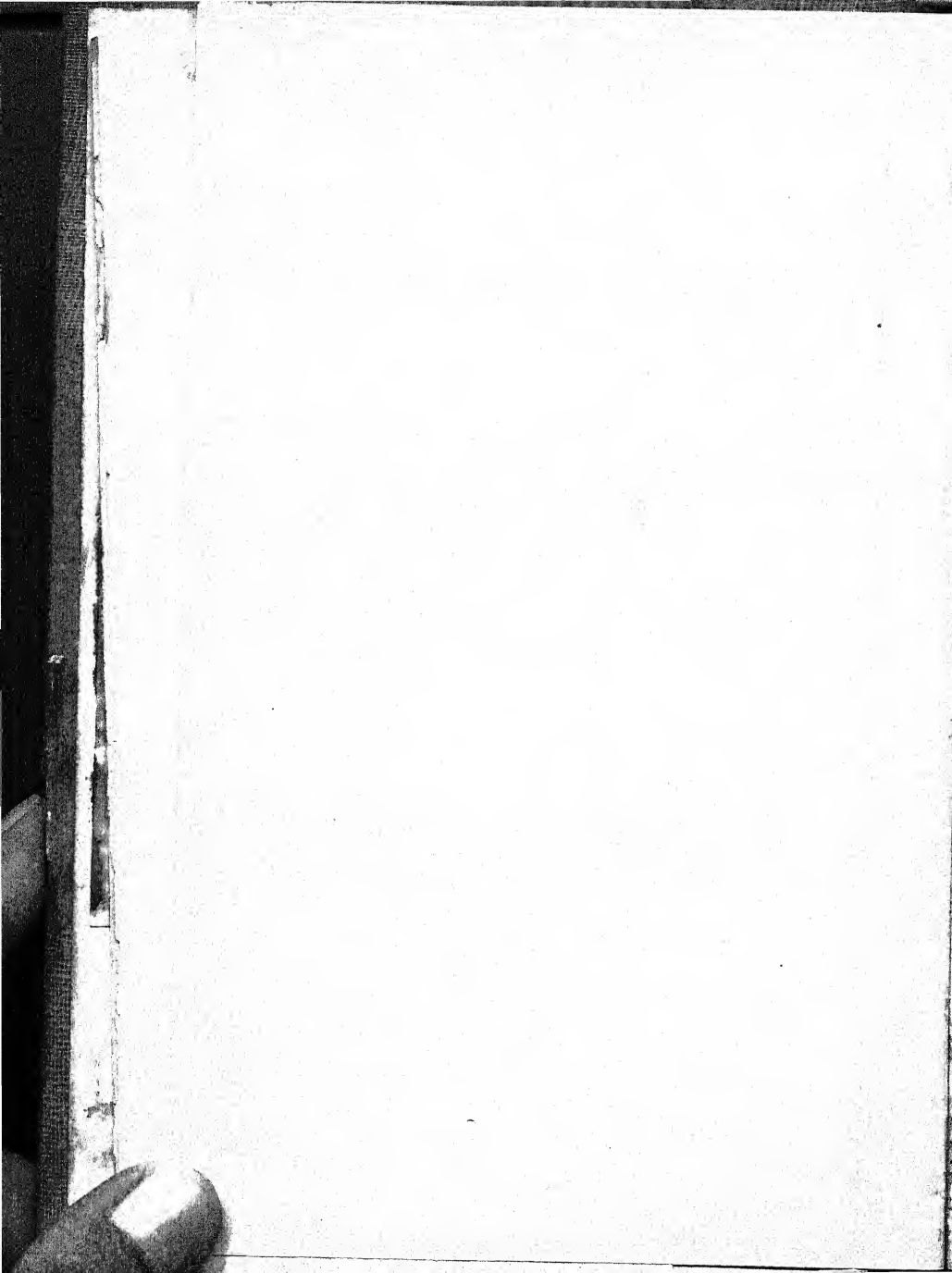
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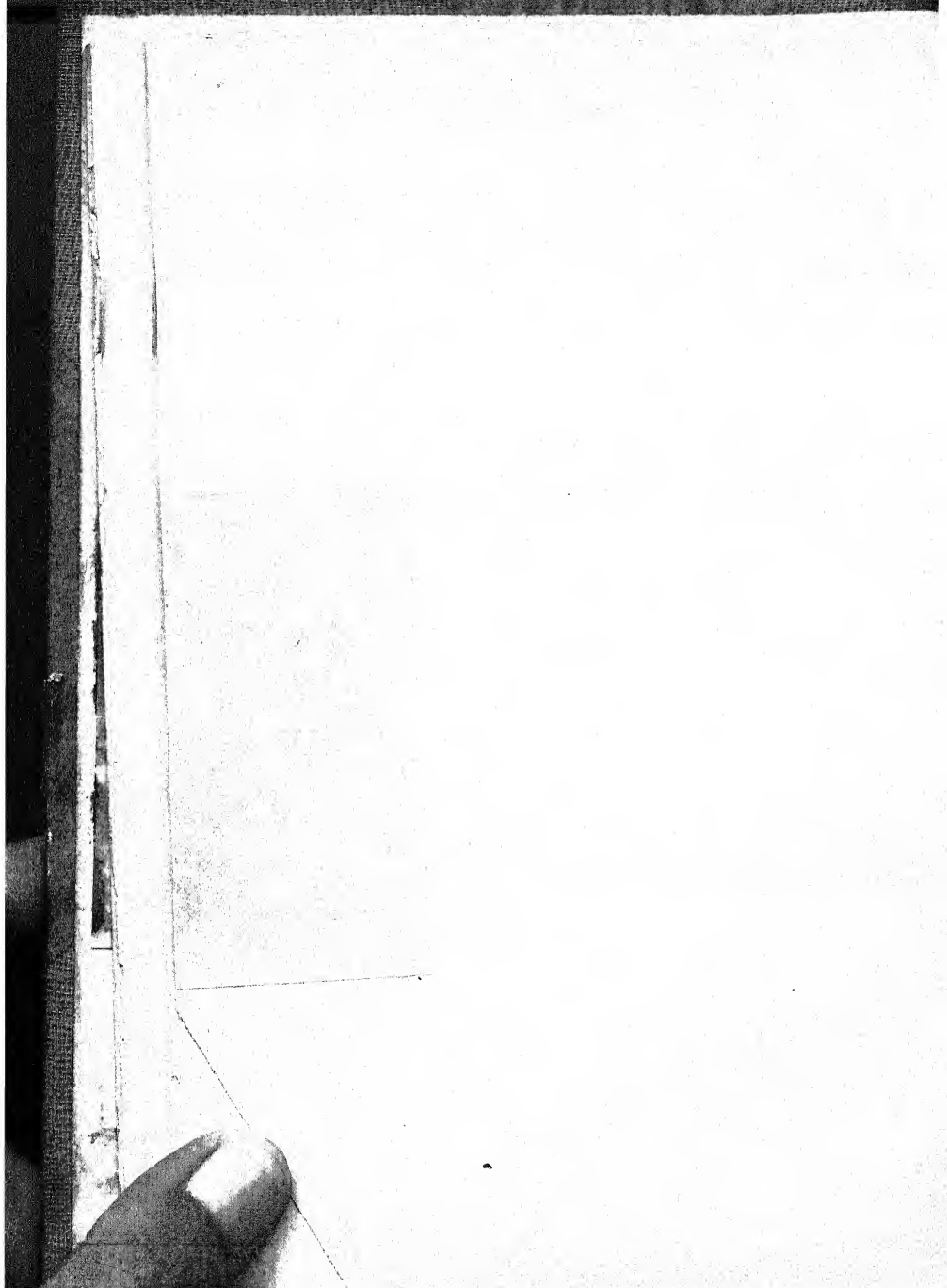
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THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

VOL. II.

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE GALLERY OF SAINT-MANDÉ.

FIFTY persons were waiting for the superintendent. He did not even take the time to place himself in the hands of his *valet de chambre* for a minute, but from the *perron* went straight into the *premier salon*. There his friends were assembled in full chat. The intendant was about to order supper to be served, but, above all, the Abbé Fouquet watched for the return of his brother, and was endeavoring to do the honors of the house in his absence. Upon the arrival of the superintendent, a murmur of joy and affection was heard; Fouquet, full of affability, good humor, and munificence, was beloved by his poets, his artists, and his men of business. His brow, upon which his little court read, as upon that of a god, all the movements of his soul, and thence drew rules of conduct,—his brow, upon which affairs of state never impressed a wrinkle, was this evening paler than usual, and more than one friendly eye remarked that pallor. Fouquet placed himself at the head of the table, and presided gayly during supper. He recounted Vatel's expedition to La Fontaine, he related the history of Menneville and the skinny fowl to Pellisson, in such a manner, that all the

table heard it. A tempest of laughter and jokes ensued, which was only checked by a serious and even sad gesture from Pellisson. The Abbé Fouquet, not being able to comprehend why his brother should have led the conversation in that direction, listened with all his ears, and sought in the countenance of Gourville, or in that of his brother, an explanation which nothing afforded him. Pellisson took up the matter:—"Did they mention M. Colbert, then?" said he.

"Why not?" replied Fouquet; "if true, as it is said to be, that the king has made him his intendant?" Scarcely had Fouquet uttered these words, with a marked intention, than an explosion broke forth among the guests.

"The miser!" said one.

"The mean, pitiful fellow!" said another.

"The hypocrite!" said a third.

Pellisson exchanged a meaning look with Fouquet. "Messieurs," said he, "in truth we are abusing a man whom no one knows: it is neither charitable nor reasonable; and here is monsieur le surintendant, who, I am sure, agrees with me."

"Entirely," replied Fouquet. "Let the fat fowls of M. Colbert alone; our business to-day is with the *faisans truffés* of M. Vatel." This speech stopped the dark cloud which was beginning to throw its shade over the guests. Gourville succeeded so well in animating the poets with the *vin de Joigny*; the abbé, intelligent as a man who stands in need of his host's money, so enlivened the financiers and the men of the sword, that, amidst the vapors of this joy and the noise of conversation, inquietudes disappeared completely. The will of Cardinal Mazarin was the text of the conversation at the second course and dessert; then Fouquet ordered bowls of sweetmeats and fountains of liquors to be carried into the

salon adjoining the gallery. He led the way thence, conducting by the hand a lady, the queen, by his preference, of the evening. The musicians then supped, and the promenades in the gallery and the gardens commenced, beneath a spring sky, mild and flower-scented. Pellisson then approached the superintendent, and said: "Something troubles monseigneur?"

"Greatly," replied the minister; "ask Gourville to tell you what it is." Pellisson, on turning round, found La Fontaine treading upon his heels. He was obliged to listen to a Latin verse, which the poet had composed upon Vatel. La Fontaine had, for an hour, been scanning this verse in all corners, seeking some one to pour it out upon advantageously. He thought he had caught Pellisson, but the latter escaped him; he turned towards Sorel, who had, himself, just composed a *quatrain* in honor of the supper, and the *Amphytrion*. La Fontaine in vain endeavored to gain attention to his verses; Sorel wanted to obtain a hearing for his *quatrain*. He was obliged to retreat before M. le Comte de Chanost, whose arm Fouquet had just taken. L'Abbé Fouquet perceived that the poet, absent-minded as usual, was about to follow the two talkers; and he interposed. La Fontaine seized upon him, and recited his verses. The abbé, who was quite innocent of Latin, nodded his head, in cadence, at every roll which La Fontaine impressed upon his body, according to the undulations of the dactyls and spondees. While this was going on, behind the confiture-basins, Fouquet related the event of the day to his son-in-law, M. de Chanost. "We will send the idle and useless to look at the fire-works," said Pellisson to Gourville, "whilst we converse here."

"So be it," said Gourville, addressing four words to Vatel. The latter then led towards the gardens the major part of the beaux, the ladies and the chattering, whilst

the men walked in the gallery, lighted by three hundred wax-lights, in the sight of all; the admirers of fire-works all ran away towards the garden. Gourville approached Fouquet, and said: "Monsieur, we are here."

"All!" said Fouquet.

"Yes,—count." The superintendent counted; there were eight persons. Pellisson and Gourville walked arm in arm, as if conversing upon vague and frivolous subjects. Sorel and two officers imitated them, in an opposite direction. The Abbé Fouquet walked alone. Fouquet, with M. de Chanost, walked as if entirely absorbed in the conversation of his son-in-law. "Messieurs," said he, "let no one of you raise his head as he walks, or appear to pay attention to me; continue walking, we are alone, listen to me."

A perfect silence ensued, disturbed only by the distant cries of the joyous guests, from the groves whence they beheld the fire-works. It was a whimsical spectacle this, of these men walking in groups, as if each one was occupied about something, whilst lending attention really to only one amongst them, who, himself, seemed to be speaking only to his companion. "Messieurs," said Fouquet, "you have, without doubt, remarked the absence of two of my friends this evening, who were with us on Wednesday. For God's sake, abbé, do not stop,—it is not necessary to enable you to listen; walk on, carrying your head in a natural way, and as you have an excellent sight, place yourself at the window, and if any one returns towards the gallery, give us notice by coughing."

The abbé obeyed.

"I have not observed their absence," said Pellisson, who, at this moment, was turning his back to Fouquet, and walking the other way.

"I do not see M. Lyodot," said Sorel, "who pays me my pension."

"And I," said the abbé, at the window, "do not see M. d'Eymeris, who owes me eleven hundred livres from our last game at Brelan."

"Sorel," continued Fouquet, walking bent, and gloomily, "you will never receive your pension any more from M. Lyodot; and you, abbé, will never be paid your eleven hundred livres by M. d'Eymeris; for both are doomed to die."

"To die!" exclaimed the whole assembly, arrested, in spite of themselves, in the comedy they were playing, by that terrible word.

"Recover yourselves, messieurs," said Fouquet, "for perhaps, we are watched—I said: to die!"

"To die!" repeated Pellisson; "what, the men I saw six days ago, full of health, gayety, and the spirit of the future! What then is man, good God! that disease should thus bring him down all at once!"

"It is not a disease," said Fouquet.

"Then there is a remedy," said Sorel.

"No remedy. Messieurs de Lyodot and D'Eymeris are on the eve of their last day."

"Of what are these gentlemen dying then?" asked an officer.

"Ask of him who kills them," replied Fouquet.

"Who kills them? Are they being killed, then?" cried the terrified chorus.

"They do better still; they are hanging them," murmured Fouquet, in a sinister voice, which sounded like a funeral knell in that rich gallery, splendid with pictures, flowers, velvet, and gold. Involuntarily every one stopped; the abbé quitted his window; the first fusees of the fire-works began to mount above the trees. A prolonged cry from the gardens attracted the superintendent to enjoy the spectacle. He drew near to a window, and his friends placed themselves behind him, attentive to his least wish.

"Messieurs," said he, "M. Colbert has caused to be arrested, tried and will execute my two friends; what does it become me to do?"

"*Mordieu!*" exclaimed the abbé, the first one to speak, "run M. Colbert through the body."

"Monseigneur," said Pellisson, "you must speak to his majesty."

"The king, my dear Pellisson, himself signed the order for the execution."

"Well!" said the Comte de Chanost, "the execution must not take place, then; that is all."

"Impossible," said Gourville, "unless we could corrupt the jailers."

"Or the governor," said Fouquet.

"This night the prisoners might be allowed to escape."

"Which of you will take charge of the transaction?"

"I," said the abbé, "will carry the money."

"And I," said Pellisson, "will be the bearer of the words."

"Words and money," said Fouquet, "five hundred thousand livres to the governor of the *conciergerie*, that is sufficient; nevertheless, it shall be a million, if necessary."

"A million!" cried the abbé; "why, for less than half, I would have half Paris sacked."

"There must be no disorder," said Pellisson. "The governor being gained, the two prisoners escape; once clear of the fangs of the law, they will call together the enemies of Colbert, and prove to the king that his young justice, like all other monstrosities, is not infallible."

"Go to Paris, then, Pellisson," said Fouquet, "and bring hither the two victims; to-morrow we shall see."

Gourville gave Pellisson the five hundred thousand livres. "Take care the wind does not carry you away,"

said the abbé; "what a responsibility. *Peste!* Let me help you a little."

"Silence!" said Fouquet, "somebody is coming. Ah! the fire-works are producing a magical effect." At this moment a shower of sparks fell rustling among the branches of the neighboring trees. Pellisson and Gourville went out together by the door of the gallery; Fouquet descended to the garden with the five last plotters.

CHAPTER II.

EPICUREANS.

As Fouquet was giving, or appearing to give, all his attention to the brilliant illuminations, the languishing music of the violins and hautboys, the sparkling sheaves of the artificial fires, which, inflaming the heavens with glowing reflections, marked behind the trees the dark profile of the donjon of Vincennes; as, we say, the superintendent was smiling on the ladies and the poets, the *fête* was every whit as gay as usual; and Vatel, whose restless, even jealous look, earnestly consulted the aspect of Fouquet, did not appear dissatisfied with the welcome given to the ordering of the evening's entertainment. The fire-works over, the company dispersed about the gardens and beneath the marble porticos with the delightful liberty which reveals in the master of the house so much forgetfulness of greatness, so much courteous hospitality, so much magnificent carelessness. The poets wandered about, arm in arm, through the groves; some reclined upon beds of moss, to the great damage of velvet clothes and curled heads, into which little dried leaves and blades of grass insinuated themselves. The ladies, in

small numbers, listened to the songs of the singers and the verses of the poets; others listened to the prose, spoken with much art, by men who were neither actors nor poets, but to whom youth and solitude gave an unaccustomed eloquence, which appeared to them better than everything else in the world. "Why," said La Fontaine, "does not our master Epicurus descend into the garden? Epicurus never abandoned his pupils; the master is wrong."

"Monsieur," said Conrart, you yourself are in the wrong persisting in decorating yourself with the name of an Epicurean; indeed, nothing here reminds me of the doctrine of the philosopher of Gargetta."

"Bah!" said La Fontaine, "is it not written that Epicurus purchased a large garden and lived in it tranquilly with his friends?"

"That is true."

"Well, has not M. Fouquet purchased a large garden at Saint-Mandé, and do we not live here very tranquilly with him and his friends?"

"Yes, without doubt; unfortunately it is neither the garden nor the friends which constitute the resemblance. Now, what likeness is there between the doctrine of Epicurus and that of M. Fouquet?"

"This—pleasure gives happiness."

"Next?"

"Well, I do not think we ought to consider ourselves unfortunate, for my part, at least. A good repast—*vin de Foigny*, which they have the delicacy to go and fetch for me from my favorite *cabaret*—not one impertinence heard during a supper an hour long, in spite of the presence of ten millionaires and twenty poets."

"I stop you there. You mentioned *vin de Foigny*, and a good repast; do you persist in that?"

"I persist,—*anteco*, as they say at Port Royal."

"Then please to recollect that the great Epicurus lived, and made his pupils live, upon bread, vegetables, and water."

"That is not certain," said La Fontaine; "and you appear to me to be confounding Epicurus with Pythagoras, my dear Conrart."

"Remember, likewise, that the ancient philosopher was rather a bad friend of the gods and the magistrates."

"Oh! that is what I will not admit," replied La Fontaine. "Epicurus was like M. Fouquet."

"Do not compare him to monsieur le surintendant," said Conrart, in an agitated voice, "or you would accredit the reports which are circulated concerning him and us."

"What reports?"

"That we are bad Frenchmen, lukewarm with regard to the king, deaf to the law."

"I return, then, to my text," said La Fontaine. "Listen, Conrart, this is the morality of Epicurus, whom, besides, I consider, if I must tell you so, as a myth. Antiquity is mostly mythical. Jupiter, if we give a little attention to it, is life. Alcides is strength. The words are there to bear me out; Zeus, that is *zen*, to live. Alcides, that is, *alcé*, vigor. Well, Epicurus, that is mild watchfulness, that is protection; now who watches better over the state, or who protects individuals better than M. Fouquet does?"

"You talk etymology and not morality; I say that we modern Epicureans are indifferent citizens."

"Oh!" cried La Fontaine, "if we become bad citizens, it is not through following the maxims of our master. Listen to one of his principal aphorisms."

"I—will."

"Pray for good leaders."

"Well?"

"Well! what does M. Fouquet say to us every day?"

‘When shall we be governed?’ Does he say so? Come, Conrart, be frank.”

“He says so, that is true.”

“Well, that is a doctrine of Epicurus.”

“Yes; but that is a little seditious, observe.”

“What! seditious to wish to be governed by good heads or leaders?”

“Certainly, when those who govern are bad.”

“Patience, I have a reply for all.”

“Even for what I have just said to you?”

“Listen! would you submit to those who govern ill? Oh! it is written: *Cacōs politeuouσι*. You grant me the text?”

“*Pardieu!* I think so. Do you know you speak Greek as well as *Æsop* did, my dear La Fontaine.”

“Is there any wickedness in that, my dear Conrart?”

“God forbid I should say so.”

“Then let us return to M. Fouquet. What did he repeat to us all the day? Was it not this? ‘What a *cruistre* is that Mazarin! what an ass! what a leech! We must, however, submit to the fellow.’ Now, Conrart, did he say so, or did he not?”

“I confess that he said it, and even perhaps too often.”

“Like Epicurus, my friend, still like Epicurus; I repeat, we are Epicureans, and that is very amusing.”

“Yes; but I am afraid there will rise up, by the side of us, a sect like that of Epictetus; you know him well; the philosopher of Hieropolis, he who called bread luxury, vegetables prodigality, and clear water drunkenness; he who, being beaten by his master, said to him, grumbling a little it is true, but without being angry. ‘I will lay a wager you have broken my leg!’—and who won his wager.”

“He was a goose, that fellow Epictetus.”

"Granted, but he might easily become the fashion by only changing his name into that of Colbert."

"Bah!" replied La Fontaine, "that is impossible. Never will you find Colbert in Epictetus."

"You are right, I shall find—*Coluber* there, at the most."

"Ah! you are beaten, Conrart; you are reduced to a play upon words. M. Arnaud pretends that I have no logic; I have more than M. Nicolle."

"Yes," replied Conrart, "you have logic, but you are a Jansenist."

This peroration was hailed with a boisterous shout of laughter; by degrees the promenaders had been attracted by the exclamations of the two disputants around the arbor under which they were arguing. The discussion had been religiously listened to, and Fouquet himself, scarcely able to suppress his laughter, had given an example of moderation. But with the *dénouement* of the scene he threw off all restraint, and laughed aloud. Everybody laughed as he did, and the two philosophers were saluted with unanimous felicitations. La Fontaine, however, was declared conqueror, on account of his profound erudition and his irrefragable logic. Conrart obtained the compensation due to an unsuccessful combatant; he was praised for the loyalty of his intentions, and the purity of his conscience.

At the moment when this jollity was manifesting itself by the most lively demonstrations, when the ladies were reproaching the two adversaries with not having admitted women into the system of Epicurean happiness, Gourville was seen hastening from the other end of the garden, approaching Fouquet, and detaching him, by his presence alone, from the group. The superintendent preserved on his face the smile and character of carelessness; but scarcely was he out of sight than he threw off the mask.

"Well!" said he, eagerly, "where is Pellisson! What is he doing?"

"Pellisson has returned from Paris."

"Has he brought back the prisoners?"

"He has not even seen *concierge* of the prison."

"What! did he not tell him he came from me?"

"He told him so, but the *concierge* sent him this reply: 'If any one came to me from M. Fouquet, he would have a letter from M. Fouquet.'"

"Oh!" cried the latter, "if a letter is all he wants——"

"It is useless, monsieur!" said Pellisson, showing himself at the corner of the little wood, "useless! Go yourself, and speak in your own name."

"You are right. I will go in, as if to work; let the horses remain harnessed, Pellisson. Entertain my friends, Gourville."

"One last word of advice, monseigneur," replied the latter.

"Speak, Gourville."

"Do not go to the *concierge* save at the last minute; it is brave, but it is not wise. Excuse me, Monsieur Pellisson, if I am not of the same opinion as you; but take my advice, monseigneur, send again a message to this *concierge*,—he is a worthy man, but do not carry it yourself."

"I will think of it," said Fouquet; "besides we have all the night before us."

"Do not reckon too much on time; were the hours we have twice as many as they are, they would not be too much," replied Pellisson; "it is never a fault to arrive too soon."

"Adieu!" said the superintendent; "come with me, Pellisson. Gourville, I commend my guests to your care." And he set off. The Epicureans did not perceive that the head of the school had left them; the violins continued playing all night long.

CHAPTER III.

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR'S DELAY.

FOUQUET, on leaving his house for the second time that day, felt himself less heavy and less disturbed than might have been expected. He turned towards Pellisson, who was meditating in the corner of the carriage some good arguments against the violent proceedings of Colbert.

"My dear Pellisson," said Fouquet, "it is a great pity you are not a woman."

"I think, on the contrary, it is very fortunate," replied Pellisson, "for, monseigneur, I am excessively ugly."

"Pellisson! Pellisson!" said the superintendent, laughing: "You repeat too often, you are 'ugly,' not to leave people to believe that it gives you much pain."

"In fact it does, monseigneur, much pain; there is no man more unfortunate than I: I was handsome, the small-pox rendered me hideous; I am deprived of a great means of attraction; now, I am your principal clerk, or something of that sort; I take great interest in your affairs, and if, at this moment, I were a pretty woman, I could render you an important service."

"What?"

"I would go and find the *concierge* of the Palais. I would seduce him, for he is a gallant man, extravagantly partial to women; then I would get away our two prisoners."

"I hope to be able to do so myself, although I am not a pretty woman," replied Fouquet.

"Granted, monseigneur; but you are compromising yourself very much."

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, suddenly, with one of those secret transports which the generous blood of youth, or the remembrance of some sweet emotion, infuses into the heart. "Oh! I know a woman who will enact the personage we stand in need of, with the lieutenant-governor of the *conciergerie*."

"And, on my part, I know fifty, monseigneur; fifty trumpets, which will inform the universe of your generosity, of your devotion to your friends, and, consequently, will ruin you sooner or later in ruining themselves."

"I do not speak of such women, Pellisson; I speak of a noble and beautiful creature who joins to the intelligence and wit of her sex the valor and coolness of ours; I speak of a woman, handsome enough to make the walls of a prison bow down to salute her, discreet enough to let no one suspect by whom she has been sent."

"A treasure!" said Pellisson; "you would make a famous present to monsieur the governor of the *Conciergerie*! *Peste!* monseigneur, he might have his head cut off; but he would, before dying, have had such happiness as no man had enjoyed before him."

"And I add," said Fouquet, "that the *concierge* of the Palais would not have his head cut off, for he would receive of me my horses, to effect his escape, and five hundred thousand livres wherewith to live comfortably in England: I add, that this lady, my friend, would give him nothing but the horses and the money. Let us go and seek her, Pellisson."

The superintendent reached forth his hand towards the gold and silken cord placed in the interior of his carriage, but Pellisson stopped him. "Monseigneur," said he, "you are going to lose as much time in seeking this lady as Columbus took to discover the new world. Now, we have

but two hours in which we can possibly succeed; the *concierge* once gone to bed, how shall we get at him without making a disturbance? When daylight dawns, how can we conceal our proceedings? Go, go yourself, monseigneur, and do not seek either woman or angel to-night."

"But, my dear Pellisson, here we are before her door."

"What! before the angel's door?"

"Why, yes!"

"This is the hotel of Madame de Bellière!"

"Hush!"

"Ah! Good Lord!" exclaimed Pellisson.

"What have you to say against her?"

"Nothing, alas! and it is that which causes my despair. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Why can I not, on the contrary, say ill enough of her to prevent your going to her?"

But Fouquet had already given orders to stop, and the carriage was motionless. "Prevent me!" cried Fouquet; "why, no power on earth should prevent my going to pay my compliments to Madame de Plessis-Bellièvre; besides, who knows that we shall not stand in need of her!"

"No, monseigneur, no!"

"But I do not wish you to wait for me, Pellisson," replied Fouquet, sincerely courteous.

"The more reason I should, monseigneur; knowing that you are keeping me waiting, you will, perhaps, stay a shorter time. Take care! You see there is a carriage in the court yard: she has some one with her." Fouquet leant towards the steps of the carriage. "One word more," cried Pellisson; "do not go to this lady till you have been to the *concierge*, for Heaven's sake!"

"Eh! five minutes, Pellisson," replied Fouquet, alighting at the steps of the hotel, leaving Pellisson in the carriage, in a very ill-humor. Fouquet ran upstairs, told

his name to the footman, which excited an eagerness and a respect that showed the habit the mistress of the house had of honoring that name in her family. "Monsieur le surintendant," cried the marquise, advancing, very pale, to meet him; "what an honor! what an unexpected pleasure!" said she. Then, in a low voice, "Take care!" added the marquise, "Marguerite Vanel is here!"

"Madame," replied Fouquet, rather agitated, "I came on business. One single word, and quickly, if you please!" And he entered the *salon*. Madame Vanel had risen, paler, more livid, than Envy herself. Fouquet in vain addressed her, with the most agreeable, most pacific salutation; she only replied by a terrible glance darted at the marquise and Fouquet. This keen glance of a jealous woman is a stiletto which pierces every cuirass; Marguerite Vanel plunged it straight into the hearts of the two confidants. She made a courtesy to *her friend*, a more profound one to Fouquet, and took leave, under pretense of having a number of visits to make, without the marquise trying to prevent her, or Fouquet, a prey to anxiety, thinking further about her. She was scarcely out of the room, and Fouquet left alone with the marquise, before he threw himself on his knees, without saying a word. "I expected you," said the marquise, with a tender sigh.

"Oh! no," cried he, "or you would have sent away that woman."

"She has been here little more than half an hour, and I had no expectation she would come this evening."

"You love me just a little, then, marquise?"

"That is not the question, now; it is of your danger; how are your affairs going on?"

"I am going this evening to get my friends out of the prisons of the Palais."

"How will you do that?"

"By buying and bribing the governor."

"He is a friend of mine ; can I assist you, without injuring you?"

"Oh! marquise, it would be a signal service ; but how can you be employed without your being compromised ? Now, never shall my life, my power, or even my liberty, be purchased at the expense of a single tear from your eyes, or of one frown of pain upon your brow."

"Monseigneur, no more such words, they bewilder me ; I have been culpable in trying to serve you, without calculating the extent of what I was doing. I love you in reality, as a tender friend, and as a friend, I am grateful for your delicate attentions—but, alas!—alas! you will never find a mistress in me."

"Marquise!" cried Fouquet, in a tone of despair ; "why not?"

"Because you are too much beloved," said the young woman, in a low voice ; "because you are too much beloved by too many people—because the splendor of glory and fortune wound my eyes, whilst the darkness of sorrow attracts them ; because, in short, I, who have repulsed you in your proud magnificence ; I who scarcely looked at you in your splendor, I came, like a mad woman, to throw myself, as it were, into your arms, when I saw a misfortune hovering over your head. You understand me, now, monseigneur ? Become happy again, that I may remain chaste in heart and in thought : your misfortune entails my ruin."

"Oh! madame," said Fouquet, with an emotion he had never before felt ; "were I to fall to the lowest degree of human misery, and hear from your mouth that word which you now refuse me, that day, madame, you will be mistaken in your noble egotism ; that day you will fancy you are consoling the most unfortunate of men, and you will have said : *I love you* to the most illustrious, the

most delighted, the most triumphant of the happy beings of this world."

He was still at her feet, kissing her hand, when Pellisson entered precipitately, crying, in very ill-humor, "Monseigneur! madame! for Heaven's sake! excuse me. Monseigneur, you have been here half an hour. Oh! do not both look at me so reproachfully. Madame, pray who is that lady who left your house soon after monseigneur came in?"

"Madame Vanel," said Fouquet.

"Ha!" cried Pellisson, "I was sure of that."

"Well! what then?"

"Why, she got into her carriage, looking deadly pale."

"What consequence is that to me?"

"Yes, but what she said to her coachman is of consequence to you."

"Kind Heaven!" cried the marquise, "what was that?"

"To M. Colbert's!" said Pellisson, in a hoarse voice.

"*Bon Dieu!*—begone, begone, monseigneur!" replied the marquise, pushing Fouquet out of the *salon*, whilst Pellisson dragged him by the hand.

"Am I, then, indeed," said the superintendent, "become a child, to be frightened by a shadow?"

"You are a giant," said the marquise, "whom a viper is trying to bite in the heel."

Pellisson continued to drag Fouquet to the carriage. "To the Palais at full speed!" cried Pellisson to the coachman. The horses set off like lightning; no obstacle relaxed their pace for an instant. Only, at the arcade Saint-Jean, as they were coming out upon the Place de Grève, a long file of horsemen, barring the narrow passage, stopped the carriage of the superintendent. There was no means of forcing this barrier; it was necessary to wait till the mounted archers of the watch, for it was they who stopped the way, had passed with the heavy carriage they were

escorting, and which ascended rapidly towards the Place Baudoyer. Fouquet and Pellisson took no further account of this circumstance beyond deploring the minute's delay they had thus to submit to. They entered the habitation of the *conciergerie du palais* five minutes after. That officer was still walking about in the front court. At the name of Fouquet, whispered in his ear by Pellisson, the governor eagerly approached the carriage, and, hat in his hand, was profuse in his attentions. "What an honor for me, monseigneur," said he.

"One word, monsieur le gouverneur, will you take the trouble to get into my carriage?" The officer placed himself opposite Fouquet in the coach.

"Monsieur," said Fouquet, "I have a service to ask of you."

"Speak, monseigneur."

"A service that will be compromising for you, monsieur, but which will assure to you forever my protection and my friendship."

"Were it to cast myself into the fire for you, monseigneur, I would do it."

"That is well," said Fouquet; "what I require is much more simple."

"That being so, monseigneur, what is it?"

"To conduct me to the chamber of Messieurs Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Will monseigneur have the kindness to say for what purpose?"

"I will tell you in their presence, monsieur; at the same time that I will give you ample means of palliating this escape."

"Escape! Why, then, monseigneur does not know?"

"What?"

"That Messrs. Lyodot and D'Eymeris are no longer here."

"Since when?" cried Fouquet, in great agitation.

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Whither have they gone, then?"

"To Vincennes—to the donjon."

"Who took them from here?"

"An order from the king."

"Oh! woe! woe!" exclaimed Fouquet, striking his forehead. "Woe!" and without saying a single word more to the governor, he threw himself back in his carriage, despair in his heart, and death on his countenance.

"Well!" said Pellisson, with great anxiety.

"Our friends are lost. Colbert is conveying them to the donjon. They crossed our very path under the arcade Saint-Jean."

Pellisson, struck as by a thunderbolt, made no reply. With a single reproach he would have killed his master.

"Where is monseigneur going?" said the footman.

"Home—to Paris. You, Pellisson, return to Saint-Mandé, and bring the Abbé Fouquet to me within an hour. Begone!"

CHAPTER IV.

PLAN OF BATTLE.

THE night was already far advanced when the Abbé Fouquet joined his brother. Gourville had accompanied him. These three men, pale with dread of future events, resembled less three powers of the day than three conspirators, united by one single thought of violence. Fouquet walked for a long time, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, striking his hands one against the other. At length, taking courage, in the midst of a deep sigh; "Abbé," said he,

"You were speaking to me only to-day of certain people you maintain!"

"Yes, monsieur," replied the abbé.

"Tell me precisely who are these people?" The abbé hesitated.

"Come! no fear, I am not threatening; no romancing, for I am not joking."

"Since you demand the truth, monseigneur, here it is:—I have a hundred and twenty friends or companions of pleasure, who are sworn to me as the thief is to the gallows."

"And you think you can depend upon them?"

"Entirely."

"And you will not compromise yourself?"

"I will not even make my appearance."

"And are they men of resolution?"

"They would burn Paris, if I promised them they should not be burnt in turn."

"The thing I ask of you, abbé," said Fouquet, wiping the sweat which fell from his brow, "is to throw your hundred and twenty men upon the people I will point out to you, at a certain moment given—is it possible?"

"It will not be the first time such a thing has happened to them, monseigneur."

"That is well: but would these bandits attack an armed force?"

"They are used to that."

"Then get your hundred and twenty men together, abbé."

"Directly. But where?"

"On the road to Vincennes, to-morrow, at two o'clock precisely."

"To carry off Lyodot and D'Eymeris? There will be blows to be got!"

"A number, no doubt; are you afraid?"

"Not for myself, but for you."

"Your men will know, then, what they have to do!"

"They are too intelligent not to guess it. Now, a minister who gets up a riot against his king—exposes himself——"

"Of what importance is that to you, I pray? Besides, if I fall, you fall with me."

"It would then be more prudent, monsieur, not to stir in the affair, and leave the king to take this little satisfaction."

"Think well of this, abbé, Lyodot and D'Eymeris at Vincennes are a prelude of ruin for my house. I repeat it—I arrested, you will be imprisoned—I imprisoned, you will be exiled."

"Monsieur, I am at your orders; have you any to give me?"

"What I told you—I wish that, to-morrow, the two financiers of whom they mean to make victims, whilst there remain so many criminals unpunished, should be snatched from the fury of my enemies. Take your measures accordingly. Is it possible?"

"It is possible."

"Describe your plan."

"It is of rich simplicity. The ordinary guard at executions consists of twelve archers."

"There will be a hundred to-morrow."

"I reckon so. I even say more—there will be two hundred."

"Then your hundred and twenty men will not be enough."

"Pardon me. In every crowd composed of a hundred thousand spectators, there are ten thousand bandits or cutpurses—only they dare not take the initiative."

"Well?"

"There will then be, to-morrow, on the Place de Grève, which I choose as my battle-field, ten thousand auxiliaries to my hundred and twenty men. The attack commenced by the latter, the others will finish it."

"That all appears feasible. But what will be done with regard to the prisoners upon the Place de Grève?"

"This; they must be thrust into some house—that will make a siege necessary to get them out again. And stop! here is another idea, more sublime still: certain houses have two issues—one upon the Place, and the other into the Rue de la Mortellerie, or la Vannerie, or la Texeranderie. The prisoners entering by one door, will go out at another."

"Yes; but fix upon something positive."

"I am seeking to do so."

"And I," cried Fouquet, "I have found it. Listen to what has occurred to me at this moment."

"I am listening."

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville, who appeared to understand. "One of my friends lends me sometimes the keys of a house which he rents, Rue Baudoyer, the spacious gardens of which extend behind a certain house of the Place de Grève."

"That is the place for us," said the abbé. "What house?"

"A *cabaret*, pretty well frequented, whose sign represents the image of Notre Dame."

"I know it," said the abbé.

"This *cabaret* has windows opening upon the Place, a place of exit into the court, which must abut upon the gardens of my friend by a door of communication."

"Good!" said the abbé.

"Enter by the *cabaret*, take the prisoners in; defend the door while you enable them to fly by the garden and the Place Baudoyer."

"That is all plain. Monsieur, you would make an excellent general, like monsieur le prince."

"Have you understood me?"

"Perfectly well."

"How much will it amount to, to make your bandits all drunk with wine, and to satisfy them with gold?"

"Oh, monsieur, what an expression! Oh! monsieur, if they heard you! some of them are very susceptible."

"I mean to say they must be brought no longer to know the heavens from the earth; for I shall to-morrow contend with the king; and when I fight I mean to conquer—please to understand."

"It shall be done, monsieur. Give me your other ideas."

"That is your business."

"Then give me your purse."

"Gourville, count a hundred thousand livres for the abbé."

"Good! and spare nothing, did you not say?"

"Nothing."

"That is well."

"Monseigneur," objected Gourville, "if this should be known, we should lose our heads."

"Eh! Gourville," replied Fouquet, purple with anger, "you excite my pity. Speak for yourself, if you please. My head does not shake in that manner upon my shoulders. Now, abbé, is everything arranged?"

"Everything."

"At two o'clock to-morrow."

"At twelve, because it will be necessary to prepare our auxiliaries in a secret manner."

"That is true; do not spare the wine of the *cabaretier*."

"I will spare neither his wine nor his house," replied the abbé, with a sneering laugh. "I have my plan, I tell

you; leave me to set it in operation, and you shall see."

"Where shall you be yourself?"

"Everywhere; nowhere."

"And how shall I receive information?"

"By a courier, whose horse shall be kept in the very garden of your friend. *A propos*, the name of your friend?"

Fouquet looked again at Gourville. The latter came to the succor of his master, saying, "Accompanying monsieur l'abbé for several reasons, only the house is easily to be known, the 'Image-de-Notre-Dame' in the front, a garden, the only one in the quarter, behind."

"Good, good! I will go and give notice to my soldiers."

"Accompany him, Gourville," said Fouquet, "and count him down the money. One moment, abbé—one moment, Gourville—what name will be given to this carrying off?"

"A very natural one, monsieur—the Riot."

"The riot on account of what? For, if ever the people of Paris are disposed to pay their court to the king, it is when he hangs financiers."

"I will manage that," said the abbé.

"Yes; but you may manage it badly, and people will guess."

"Not at all,—not at all. I have another idea."

"What is that?"

"My men shall cry out 'Colbert, *vive* Colbert!' and shall throw themselves upon the prisoners as if they would tear them in pieces, and shall force them from the gibbets, as too mild a punishment."

"Ah! that is an idea," said Gourville. *Peste!* monsieur l'abbé, what an imagination you have!"

"Monsieur, we are worthy of our family," replied the abbé, proudly.

"Strange fellow," murmured Fouquet. Then he added, "That is ingenious. Carry it out, but shed no blood."

Gourville and the abbé set off together, with their heads full of the meditated riot. The superintendent laid himself down upon some cushions, half valiant with respect to the sinister projects of the morrow, half dreaming of love.

CHAPTER V.

THE CABARET OF THE IMAGE-DE-NOTRE-DAME.

At two o'clock the next day fifty thousand spectators had taken their position upon the Place, around the two gibbets which had been elevated between the Quai de la Grève and the Quai Pelletier; one close to the other, with their backs to the embankment of the river. In the morning also, all the sworn criers of the good city of Paris had traversed the quarters of the city, particularly the *halles* and the *faubourgs*, announcing with their hoarse and indefatigable voices, the great justice done by the king upon two speculators, two thieves, devourers of the people. And these people, whose interests were so warmly looked after, in order not to fail in respect for their king, quitted shops, stalls, and *ateliers*, to go and evince a little gratitude to Louis XIV., absolutely like invited guests, who feared to commit an impoliteness in not repairing to the house of him who had invited them. According to the tenor of the sentence, which the criers read aloud and incorrectly, two farmers of the revenues, monopolists of money, dilapidators of the royal provisions, extortioners, and forgers, were about to undergo capital punishment on the Place de Grève, with their names blazoned over their heads,

according to their sentence. As to those names, the sentence made no mention of them. The curiosity of the Parisians was at its height, and, as we have said, an immense crowd waited with feverish impatience the hour fixed for the execution. The news had already spread that the prisoners, transferred to the Château of Vincennes, would be conducted from that prison to the Place de Grève. Consequently, the faubourg and the Rue Saint Antoine were crowded; for the population of Paris in those days of great executions was divided into two categories; those who came to see the condemned pass—these were of timid and mild hearts, but philosophically curious—and those who wished to see the condemned die—these had hearts that hungered for sensation. On this day M. d'Artagnan received his last instructions from the king, and made his adieus to his friends, the number of whom was, at the moment, reduced to Planchet, traced the plan of his day, as every busy man whose moments are counted ought to do, because he appreciates their importance.

“My departure is to be,” said he, “at break of day, three o'clock in the morning; I have then fifteen hours before me. Take from them the six hours of sleep which are indispensable for me—six; one hour for repasts—seven; one hour for a farewell visit to Athos—eight; two hours for chance circumstances—total, ten. There are then five hours left. One hour to get my money,—that is, to have payment refused by M. Fouquet; another hour to go and receive my money of M. Colbert, together with his questions and grimaces; one hour to look over my clothes and arms, and get my boots cleaned. I have still two hours left. *Mordioux!* how rich I am!” And so saying, D'Artagnan felt a strange joy, a joy of youth, a perfume of those great and happy years of former times mount into his brain and intoxicate him. “During these two hours I will go,” said the musketeer, “and take my

quarter's rent of the Image-de-Notre-Dame. That will be pleasant! Three hundred and seventy-five livres! *Mordioux!* but that is astonishing! If the poor man who has but one livre in his pocket, found a livre and twelve deniers, that would be justice, that would be excellent; but never does such a god-send fall to the lot of the poor man. The rich man, on the contrary, makes himself revenues with his money, which he does not even touch. Here are three hundred and seventy-five livres which fall to me from heaven. I will go then to the Image-de-Notre-Dame, and drink a glass of Spanish wine with my tenant, which he cannot fail to offer me. But order must be observed, Monsieur d'Artagnan, order must be observed! Let us organize our time, then, and distribute the employment of it! Art. 1st, Athos; Art. 2d the Image-de-Notre-Dame; Art. 3rd, M. Fouquet; Art. 4th, M. Colbert; Art. 5th, supper; Art. 6th, clothes, boots, horse, portmanteau; Art. 7th and last, sleep."

In consequence of this arrangement, D'Artagnan went straight to the Comte de la Fère, to whom modestly and ingenuously, he related a part of his fortunate adventures. Athos had not been without uneasiness on the subject of D'Artagnan's visit to the king; but few words sufficed for an explanation of that. Athos divined that Louis had charged D'Artagnan with some important mission, and did not even make an effort to draw the secret from him. He only recommended him to take care of himself, and offered discreetly to accompany him if that were desirable.

"But, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "I am going nowhere."

"What! you come and bid me adieu, and are going nowhere?"

"Oh! yes, yes," replied D'Artagnan, coloring a little, "I am going to make an acquisition."

"That is quite another thing. Then I change my formula. Instead of 'Do not get yourself killed,' I will say—'Do not get yourself robbed.'"

"My friend, I will inform you if I set eyes on any property that pleases me, and shall expect you will favor me with your opinion."

"Yes, yes," said Athos, too delicate to permit himself even the consolation of a smile. Raoul imitated the paternal reserve. But D'Artagnan thought it would appear too mysterious to leave his friends under a pretense, without even telling them the route he was about to take.

"I have chosen Le Mans," said he to Athos. "Is it a good country?"

"Excellent, my friend," replied the count, without making him observe that Le Mans was in the same direction as La Touraine, and that by waiting two days, at most, he might travel with a friend. But D'Artagnan, more embarrassed than the count, dug, at every explanation, deeper into the mud, into which he sank by degrees. "I shall set out to-morrow at day-break," said he at last. "Till that time, will you come with me, Raoul?"

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier," said the young man, "if monsieur le comte does not want me."

"No, Raoul; I am to have an audience to-day of Monsieur, the king's brother; that is all I have to do."

Raoul asked Grimaud for his sword, which the old man brought him immediately. "Now then," added D'Artagnan, opening his arms to Athos, "adieu, my dear friend!" Athos held him in a long embrace, and the musketeer, who knew his discretion so well, murmured in his ear—"An affair of state," to which Athos only replied by a pressure of the hand, still more significant. They then separated. Raoul took the arm of his old friend, who led him along the Rue Saint-Honoré. "I am conducting

you to the abode of the god Plutus," said D'Artagnan to the young man; "prepare yourself. The whole day you will witness the piling-up of crowns. Heavens! how I am changed!"

"Oh! what numbers of people there are in the street!" said Raoul.

"Is there a procession to-day?" asked D'Artagnan of a passer-by.

"Monsieur, it is a hanging," replied the man.

"What! a hanging at the Grève?" said D'Artagnan,

"Yes, monsieur."

"The devil take the rogue who gets himself hung the day I want to go and take my rent!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Raoul, did you ever see anybody hung?"

"Never, monsieur—thank God!"

"Oh! how young that sounds! If you were on guard in the trenches, as I was, and a spy!—But, pardon me, Raoul, I am doting—you are quite right, it is a hideous sight to see a person hung! At what hour do they hang them, monsieur, if you please?"

"Monsieur," replied the stranger respectfully, delighted at joining conversation with two men of the sword; "it will take place about three o'clock."

"Aha! it is now only half-past one; let us step out, we shall be there in time to touch my three hundred and seventy-five livres, and get away before the arrival of the malefactor."

"Malefactors, monsieur," continued the *bourgeois*; "there are two of them."

"Monsieur I return you many thanks," said D'Artagnan, who as he grew older, had become polite to a degree. Drawing Raoul along, he directed his course rapidly in the direction of La Grève. Without that great experience musketeers have of a crowd, to which were joined an irresistible strength of wrist and an uncommon suppleness of

shoulders, our two travelers would not have arrived at their place of destination. They followed the line of the *Quai*, which they had gained on quitting the Rue Saint-Honoré, where they left Athos. D'Artagnan went first; his elbow, his wrist, his shoulder formed three wedges which he knew how to insinuate with skill into the groups, to make them split and separate like firewood. He made use sometimes of the hilt of his sword as an additional help: introducing it between ribs that were too rebellious, making it take the part of a lever or crow-bar, to separate husband from wife, uncle from nephew, and brother from brother. And all this was done so naturally, and with such gracious smiles, that people must have had ribs of bronze, not to cry thank you when the wrist made its play, or hearts of diamond not to be enchanted when such a bland smile enlivened the lips of the musketeer. Raoul, following his friend, cajoled the women who admired his beauty, pushed back the men, who felt the rigidity of his muscles, and both opened, thanks to these maneuvers, the compact and muddy tide of the populace. They arrived in sight of the two gibbets, from which Raoul turned away his eyes in disgust. As for D'Artagnan, he did not even see them; his house with its gabled roof, its windows crowded with the curious, attracted and even absorbed all the attention he was capable of. He distinguished in the Place and around the houses a good number of musketeers on leave, who, some with women, others with friends, awaited the crowning ceremony. What rejoiced him above all was to see that his tenant, the *cabaretier*, was so busy he hardly knew which way to turn. Three lads could not supply the drinkers. They filled the shop, the chambers, and the court even. D'Artagnan called Raoul's attention to this concourse, adding: "The fellow will have no excuse for not paying his rent. Look at those drinkers, Raoul, one would say they were jolly companions. *Mor-*

diorux! why, there is no room anywhere!" D'Artagnan, however, contrived to catch hold of the master by the corner of his apron, and to make himself known to him."

"Ah, monsieur le chevalier," said the *cabaretier*, half distracted, "one minute if you please. I have here a hundred mad devils turning my cellar upside down."

"The cellar, if you like, but not the money box."

"Oh, monsieur, your thirty-seven and a half pistoles are all counted out ready for you, upstairs in my chamber; but there are in that chamber thirty customers, who are sucking the staves of a little barrel of Oporto which I tapped for them this very morning. Give me a minute,—only a minute?"

"So be it; so be it."

"I will go," said Raoul, in a low voice, to D'Artagnan; "this hilarity is vile!"

"Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, sternly, "you will please to remain where you are. The soldier ought to familiarize himself with all kinds of spectacles. There are in the eye, when it is young, fibres which we must learn how to harden; and we are not truly generous and good save from the moment when the eye has become hardened, and the heart remains tender. Besides, my little Raoul, would you leave me alone here? That would be very wrong of you. Look, there is yonder in the lower court a tree, and under the shade of that tree we shall breathe more freely than in this hot atmosphere of spilt wine."

From the spot on which they had placed themselves the two new guests of the Image-de-Notre-Dame, heard the ever-increasing hubbub of the tide of people, and lost neither a cry nor a gesture of the drinkers, at tables in the *cabaret*, or disseminated in the chambers. If D'Artagnan had wished to place himself as a *vidette* for an expedition, he could not have succeeded better. The tree under

when he and Raoul were seated covered them with its already thick foliage; it was a low, thick chestnut-tree, with inclined branches, that cast their shade over a table so dilapidated the drinkers had abandoned it. We said that from this post D'Artagnan saw everything. He observed the goings and comings of the waiters; the arrival of fresh drinkers; the welcome, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, given to the new-comers, by others already installed. He observed all this to amuse himself, for the thirty-seven and a half pistoles were a long time coming. Raoul recalled his attention to it. "Monsieur," said he, "you do not hurry your tenant, and the condemned will soon be here. There will then be such a press we shall not be able to get out."

"You are right," said the musketer, "*Holà! oh! somebody there! Mordieu!*" But it was in vain he cried and knocked upon the wreck of the old table, which fell to pieces beneath his fist; nobody came. D'Artagnan was preparing to go and seek the *cabaretier* himself, to force him to a definite explanation, when the door of the court in which he was with Raoul, a door which communicated with the garden situated at the back, opened, and a man dressed as a cavalier, with his sword in the sheath, but not at his belt, crossed the court without closing the door; and having cast an oblique glance at D'Artagnan and his companion, directed his course towards the *cabaret* itself, looking about in all directions with his eyes capable of piercing walls of consciences. "Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "my tenants are communicating. That, no doubt, now, is some amateur in hanging matters." At the same moment, the cries and disturbance in the upper chambers ceased. Silence, under such circumstances, surprises more than a twofold increase of noise. D'Artagnan wished to see what was the cause of this sudden silence. He then perceived that

this man, dressed as a cavalier, had just entered the principal chamber, and was haranguing the tipplers, who all listened to him with the greatest attention. D'Artagnan would perhaps have heard his speech but for the dominant noise of the popular clamors, which made a formidable accompaniment to the harangue of the orator. But it was soon finished, and all the people the *cabaret* contained came out, one after the other, in little groups, so that there only remained six in the chamber; one of these six, the man with the sword, took the *cabaretier* aside, engaging him in discourse more or less serious, whilst the others lit a great fire in the chimney-place—a circumstance rendered strange by the fine weather and the heat.

"It is very singular," said D'Artagnan to Raoul, "but I think I know those faces yonder."

"Don't you think you can smell the smoke here?" said Raoul.

"I rather think I can smell a conspiracy," replied D'Artagnan.

He had not finished speaking, when four of these men came down into the court, and without the appearance of any bad design, mounted guard at the door of communication, casting, at intervals, glances at D'Artagnan, which signified many things.

"*Mordious!*" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, "there is something going on. Are you curious, Raoul?"

"According to the subject, chevalier."

"Well, I am as curious as an old woman. Come a little more in front; we shall get a better view of the place. I would lay a wager that view will be something curious."

"But you know, monsieur le chevalier, that I am not willing to become a passive and indifferent spectator of the death of the two poor devils."

"And I, then—do you think I am a savage? We will

go in again, when it is time to do so. Come along!" And they made their way towards the front of the house, and placed themselves near the window which, still more strangely than the rest, remained unoccupied. The two last drinkers, instead of looking out at this window, kept up the fire. On seeing D'Artagnan and his friend enter:—"Ah! ah! a reinforcement," murmured they.

D'Artagnan jogged Raoul's elbow. "Yes, my braves, a reinforcement," said he; "*cordieu!* there is a famous fire. Whom are you going to cook?"

The two men uttered a shout of jovial laughter, and, instead of answering, threw on more wood. D'Artagnan could not take his eyes off them.

"I suppose," said one of the fire-makers, "they sent you to tell us the time—did not they?"

"Without doubt they have," said D'Artagnan, anxious to know what was going on; "why should I be here else, if it were not for that?"

"Then place yourself at the window, if you please, and observe." D'Artagnan smiled in his mustache, made a sign to Raoul, and placed himself at the window.

CHAPTER VI.

VIVE COLBERT !

THE spectacle which the Grève now presented was a frightful one. The heads, leveled by the perspective, extended afar, thick and agitated as the ears of corn in a vast plain. From time to time a fresh report, or a distant rumor, made the heads oscillate and thousands of eyes flash. Now and then there were great movements. All those ears of corn bent, and became waves mere agitated than

those of the ocean, which rolled from the extremities to the center, and beat, like the tides, against the hedge of archers who surrounded the gibbets. Then the handles of the halberds were let fall upon the heads and shoulders of the rash invaders; at times, also, it was the steel as well as the wood, and, in that case, a large empty circle was formed around the guard; a space conquered upon the extremities, which underwent, in their turn the oppression of the sudden movement, which drove them against the parapets of the Seine. From the window, that commanded a view of the whole Place, D'Artagnan saw, with interior satisfaction, that such of the musketeers and guards as found themselves involved in the crowd, were able, with blows of their fists and the hilts of their swords, to keep room. He even remarked that they had succeeded, by that *esprit de corps* which doubles the strength of the soldier, in getting together in one group to the amount of about fifty men; and that, with the exception of a dozen stragglers whom he still saw rolling here and there, the nucleus was complete, and within reach of his voice. But it was not the musketeers and guards only that drew the attention of D'Artagnan. Around the gibbets, and particularly at the entrances to the arcade of Saint-Jean, moved a noisy mass, a busy mass; daring faces, resolute demeanors were to be seen here and there, mingled with silly faces and indifferent demeanors; signals were exchanged, hands given and taken. D'Artagnan remarked among the groups, and those groups the most animated, the face of the cavalier whom he had seen enter by the door of communication from his garden, and who had gone upstairs to harangue the drinkers. That man was organizing troops and giving orders.

"*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan to himself, "I was not deceived; I know that man,—it is Menneville. What the devil is he doing here!"

A distant murmur, which became more distinct by degrees, stopped this reflection, and drew his attention another way. This murmur was occasioned by the arrival of the culprits; a strong picket of archers preceded them, and appeared at the angle of the arcade. The entire crowd now joined as if in one cry; all the cries united formed one immense howl. D'Artagnan saw Raoul was becoming pale, and he slapped him roughly on the shoulder. The fire-keepers turned round on hearing the great cry, and asked what was going on. "The condemned are arrived," said D'Artagnan. "That's well," replied they, again replenishing the fire. D'Artagnan looked at them with much uneasiness; it was evident that these men who were making such a fire for no apparent purpose had some strange intentions. The condemned appeared upon the Place. They were walking, the executioner before them, whilst fifty archers formed a hedge on their right and their left. Both were dressed in black; they appeared pale, but firm. They looked impatiently over the people's heads, standing on tip-toe at every step. D'Artagnan remarked this. "*Mordieux!*" cried he, "they are in a great hurry to get a sight of the gibbet!" Raoul drew back, without, however, having the power to leave the window. Terror even has its attractions.

"To the death! to the death!" cried fifty thousand voices.

"Yes; to the death!" howled a hundred frantic others, as if the great mass had given them the reply.

"To the halter! to the halter!" cried the great whole; "*Vive le roi!*"

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "this is droll; I should have thought it was M. Colbert who had caused them to be hung."

There was, at this moment, a great rolling movement in the crowd, which stopped for a moment the march of

the condemned. The people of a bold and resolute mien, whom D'Artagnan had observed, by dint of pressing, pushing, and lifting themselves up, had succeeded in almost touching the hedge of archers. The *cortège* resumed its march. All at once, to cries of "*Vive Colbert!*" those men, of whom D'Artagnan never lost sight, fell upon the escort, which in vain endeavored to stand against them. Behind these men was the crowd. Then commenced, amidst a frightful tumult, as frightful a confusion. This time, there was something more than cries of expectation or cries of joy, there were cries of pain. Halberds struck men down, swords ran them through, muskets were discharged at them. The confusion became then so great that D'Artagnan could no longer distinguish anything. Then, from this chaos, suddenly surged something like a visible intention, like a will pronounced. The condemned had been torn from the hands of the guards, and were being dragged towards the house of L'Image-de-Notre-Dame. Those who dragged them shouted, "*Vive Colbert!*" The people hesitated, not knowing which they ought to fall upon, the archers or the aggressors. What stopped the people was, that those who cried "*Vive Colbert!*" began to cry, at the same time, "No halter! No halter! to the fire! to the fire! burn the thieves! burn the extortioners!" This cry, shouted with an *ensemble*, obtained enthusiastic success. The populace had come to witness an execution, and here was an opportunity offered them of performing one themselves. It was this that must be most agreeable to the populace: therefore, they ranged themselves immediately on the party of the aggressors against the archers, crying with the minority, which had become, thanks to them, the most compact majority. "Yes, yes; to the fire with the thieves! *Vive Colbert!*"

"*Mordious!*" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this begins to look serious."



MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.



One of the men who remained near the chimney approached the window, a firebrand in his hand. "Ah, ah!" said he, "it gets warm." Then, turning to his companion, "There is the signal," added he; and he immediately applied the burning brand to the wainscoting. Now, this *cabaret* of the Image-de-Nôtre-Dame was not a very newly-built house; and therefore, did not require much entreating to take fire. In a second the boards began to crackle, and the flames arose sparkling to the ceiling. A howling from without replied to the shouts of the incendiaries. D'Artagnan, who had not seen what passed, from being engaged at the window, felt, at the same time, the smoke which choked him and the fire that scorched him. "*Holà!*" cried he, turning round, "is the fire here? Are you drunk or mad, my masters?"

The two men looked at each other with an air of astonishment. "In what?" asked they of D'Artagnan; "was it not a thing agreed upon?"

"A thing agreed upon that you should burn my house!" vociferated D'Artagnan, snatching the brand from the hand of the incendiary, and striking him with it across the face. The second wanted to assist his comrade, but Raoul, seizing him by the middle, threw him out of the window, whilst D'Artagnan pushed his man down the stairs. Raoul, first disengaged, tore the burning wainscoting down, and threw it flaming into the chamber. At a glance, D'Artagnan saw there was nothing to be feared from the fire, and sprang to the window. The disorder was at its height. The air was filled with simultaneous cries of "To the fire!" "To the death!" "To the halter!" "To the stake!" "*Vive Colbert!*" "*Vive le roi!*" The group which had forced the culprits from the hands of the archers had drawn close to the house, which appeared to be the goal towards which they dragged them. Men-

neville was at the head of this group, shouting louder than all the others, "To the fire! to the fire! *Vive Colbert!*" D'Artagnan began to comprehend what was meant. They wanted to burn the condemned, and his house was to serve as a funeral pile.

"Halt, there!" cried he, sword in hand, and one foot upon the window. "Menneville, what do you want to do?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," cried the latter; "give way, give way!"

"To the fire! to the fire with the thieves! *Vive Colbert!*"

These cries exasperated D'Artagnan. "*Mordioux!*" said he. "What! burn the poor devils who are only condemned to be hung? that is infamous!"

Before the door, however, the mass of anxious spectators, rolled back against the walls, had become more thick, and closed up the way. Menneville and his men, who were dragging along the culprits, were within ten paces of the door.

Menneville made a last effort. "Passage! passage!" cried he, pistol in hand.

"Burn them! burn them!" repeated the crowd. "The Image-de-Notre-Dame is on fire! Burn the thieves! burn the monopolists in the Image-de-Notre-Dame!"

There now remained no doubt, it was plainly D'Artagnan's house that was their object. D'Artagnan remembered the old cry, always so effective from his mouth: "*À moi! mousquetaires!*" shouted he, with the voice of a giant, with one of those voices which dominate over cannon, the sea, the tempest. "*À moi! mousquetaires!*" And suspending himself by the arm from the balcony, he allowed himself to drop amidst the crowd, which began to draw back from a house that rained men. Raoul was on the ground as soon as he, both sword in hand. All the musket-

eers on the Place heard that challenging cry—all turned round at that cry, and recognized D'Artagnan. "To the captain, to the captain!" cried they, in their turn. And the crowd opened before them as though before the prow of a vessel. At that moment D'Artagnan and Menneville found themselves face to face. "Passage, passage!" cried Menneville, seeing that he was within an arm's length of the door.

"No one passes here," said D'Artagnan.

"Take that, then!" said Menneville, firing his pistol, almost within arm's-length. But before the cock fell, D'Artagnan had struck up Menneville's arm with the hilt of his sword, and passed the blade through his body.

"I told you plainly to keep yourself quiet," said D'Artagnan to Menneville, who rolled at his feet.

"Passage! passage!" cried the companions of Menneville, at first terrified, but soon recovering, when they found they had only to do with two men. But those two men were hundred-armed giants; the swords flew about in their hands like the burning *glaive* of the archangel. They pierce with its point, strike with the flat, cut with the edge; every stroke brings down a man. "For the king!" cried D'Artagnan, to every man he struck at, that is to say, to every man that fell. This cry became the charging word for the musketeers, who, guided by it, joined D'Artagnan. During this time the archers, recovering from the panic they had undergone, charge the aggressors in the rear, and regular as mill-strokes, overturn or knock down all that oppose them. The crowd, which sees swords gleaming, and drops of blood flying in the air—the crowd falls back and crushes itself. At length cries for mercy and of despair resound; that is, the farewell of the vanquished. The two condemned are again in the hands of the archers. D'Artagnan approaches them, seeing them pale and sinking:

"Console yourselves, poor men," said he, "you will not undergo the frightful torture with which these wretches threatened you. The king has condemned you to be hung: you shall only be hung. Go on, hang them, and it will be over."

There is no longer anything going on at the Image-de-Nôtre-Dame. The fire has been extinguished with two tuns of wine in default of water. The conspirators have fled by the garden. The archers were dragging the culprits to the gibbets. From this moment the affair did not occupy much time. The executioner, heedless about operating according to the rules of art, made such haste, that he dispatched the condemned in a couple of minutes. In the meantime the people gathered around D'Artagnan, —they felicitated, they cheered him. He wiped his brow, streaming with sweat, and his sword, streaming with blood. He shrugged his shoulders at seeing Menneville writhing at his feet in the last convulsions. And, while Raoul turned away his eyes in compassion, he pointed to the musketeers the gibbets laden with their melancholy fruit. "Poor devils!" said he, "I hope they died blessing me, for I saved them with great difficulty." These words caught the ear of Menneville at the moment when he himself was breathing his last sigh. A dark, ironical smile flitted across his lips; he wished to reply, but the effort hastened the snapping of the chord of life—he expired.

"Oh! all this is very frightful!" murmured Raoul: "let us begone, monsieur le chevalier."

"You are not wounded?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Not at all; thank you."

"That's well! Thou art a brave fellow, *mordoux*! The head of the father, and the arm of Porthos. Ah! if he had been here, good Porthos, you would have seen

something worth looking at." Then as if by way of remembrance—

"But where the devil can that brave Porthos be?" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Come, chevalier, pray come away," urged Raoul.

"One minute, my friend; let me take my thirty-seven and a half pistoles, and I am at your service. The house is a good property," added D'Artagnan, as he entered the Image-de-Notre-Dame, "but decidedly, even if it were less profitable, I should prefer its being in another quarter."

CHAPTER VII.

HOW M. D'EYMERIS'S DIAMOND PASSED INTO THE HANDS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN.

WHILST this violent, noisy, and bloody scene was passing on the Grève, several men, barricaded behind the gate of communication with the garden, replaced their swords in their sheaths, assisted one among them to mount a ready saddled horse which was waiting in the garden, and like a flock of startled birds, fled in all directions, some climbing the walls, others rushing out at the gates with all the fury of a panic. He who mounted the horse, and gave him the spur so sharply that the animal was near leaping the wall, this cavalier, we say, crossed the Place Baudoyer, passed like lightning before the crowd in the streets, riding against, running over, and knocking down all that came in his way, and, ten minutes after, arrived at the gates of the superintendent, more out of breath than his horse. The Abbé Fouquet, at the clatter of the hoofs on the pavement, appeared at a window of the court, and

before even the cavalier had set foot to the ground, "Well! Danecamp?" cried he, leaning half out of the window.

"Well, it is all over," replied the cavalier.

"All over!" cried the abbé. "Then they are saved?"

"No, monsieur," replied the cavalier, "they are hung."

"Hung!" repeated the abbé, turning pale. A lateral door suddenly opened, and Fouquet appeared in the chamber, pale, distracted, with lips half opened, breathing a cry of grief and anger. He stopped upon the threshold to listen to what was addressed from the court to the window.

"Miserable wretches!" said the abbé, "you did not fight, then?"

"Like lions."

"Say like cowards."

"Monsieur!"

"A hundred men accustomed to war, sword in hand, are worth ten thousand archers in a surprise. Where is Menneville, that boaster, that braggart, who was to come back either dead or a conqueror?"

"Well, monsieur, he has kept his word. He is dead!"

"Dead! Who killed him?"

"A demon disguised as a man, a giant armed with ten flaming swords—a madman, who at one blow extinguished the fire, put down the riot, and caused a hundred musketeers to rise up out of the pavement of the Grève."

Fouquet raised his brow, streaming with sweat, murmuring, "Oh! Lyodot and D'Eymeris! dead! dead! dead! and I dishonored."

The abbé turned round, and perceiving his brother, despairing and livid, "Come, come," said he, "it is a blow of fate, monsieur; we must not lament thus. Our attempt has failed, because God——"

"Be silent, abbé! be silent!" cried Fouquet; "your

excuses are blasphemies. Order that man up here, and let him relate the details of this terrible event."

"But, brother——"

"Obey, monsieur!"

The abbé made a sign, and in half a minute the man's step was heard upon the stairs. At the same time Gourville appeared behind Fouquet, like the guardian angel of the superintendent, pressing one finger on his lips to enjoin observation even amidst the bursts of his grief. The minister resumed all the serenity that human strength left at the disposal of a heart half broken with sorrow. Danecamp appeared. "Make your report," said Gourville.

"Monsieur," replied the messenger, "we received orders to carry off the prisoners, and to cry '*Vive Colbert!*' whilst carrying them off."

"To burn them alive, was it not, abbé?" interrupted Gourville.

"Yes, yes, the order was given to Menneville. Menneville knew what was to be done, and Menneville is dead."

This news appeared rather to reassure Gourville than to sadden him.

"Yes, certainly to burn them alive," said the abbé, eagerly.

"Granted, monsieur, granted," said the man, looking into the eyes and the faces of the two interlocutors, to ascertain what there was profitable or disadvantageous to himself in telling the truth.

"Now, proceed," said Gourville.

"The prisoners," cried Danecamp, "were brought to the Grève, and the people, in a fury, insisted upon their being burnt instead of being hung."

"And the people were right," said the abbé. "Go on."

"But," resumed the man, "at the moment the archers were broken, at the moment the fire was set to one of the

houses of the Place destined to serve as a funeral-pile for the guilty, this fury, this demon, this giant of whom I told you, and who, we had been informed, was the proprietor of the house in question, aided by a young man who accompanied him, threw out of the window those who kept up the fire, called to his assistance the musketeers who were in the crowd, leaped himself from the window of the first story into the Place, and plied his sword so desperately that the victory was restored to the archers, the prisoners were retaken, and Menneville killed. When once recaptured, the condemned were executed in three minutes." Fouquet, in spite of his self-command, could not prevent a deep groan escaping him.

"And this man, the proprietor of the house, what is his name?" said the abbé.

"I cannot tell you, not having even been able to get sight of him; my post had been appointed in the garden, and I remained at my post: only the affair was related to me as I repeat it. I was ordered, when once the affair was at an end, to come at best speed and announce to you the manner in which it finished. According to this order, I set out, full gallop, and here I am."

"Very well, monsieur, we have nothing else to ask of you," said the abbé, more and more dejected, in proportion as the moment approached for finding himself alone with his brother.

"Have you been paid?" asked Gourville.

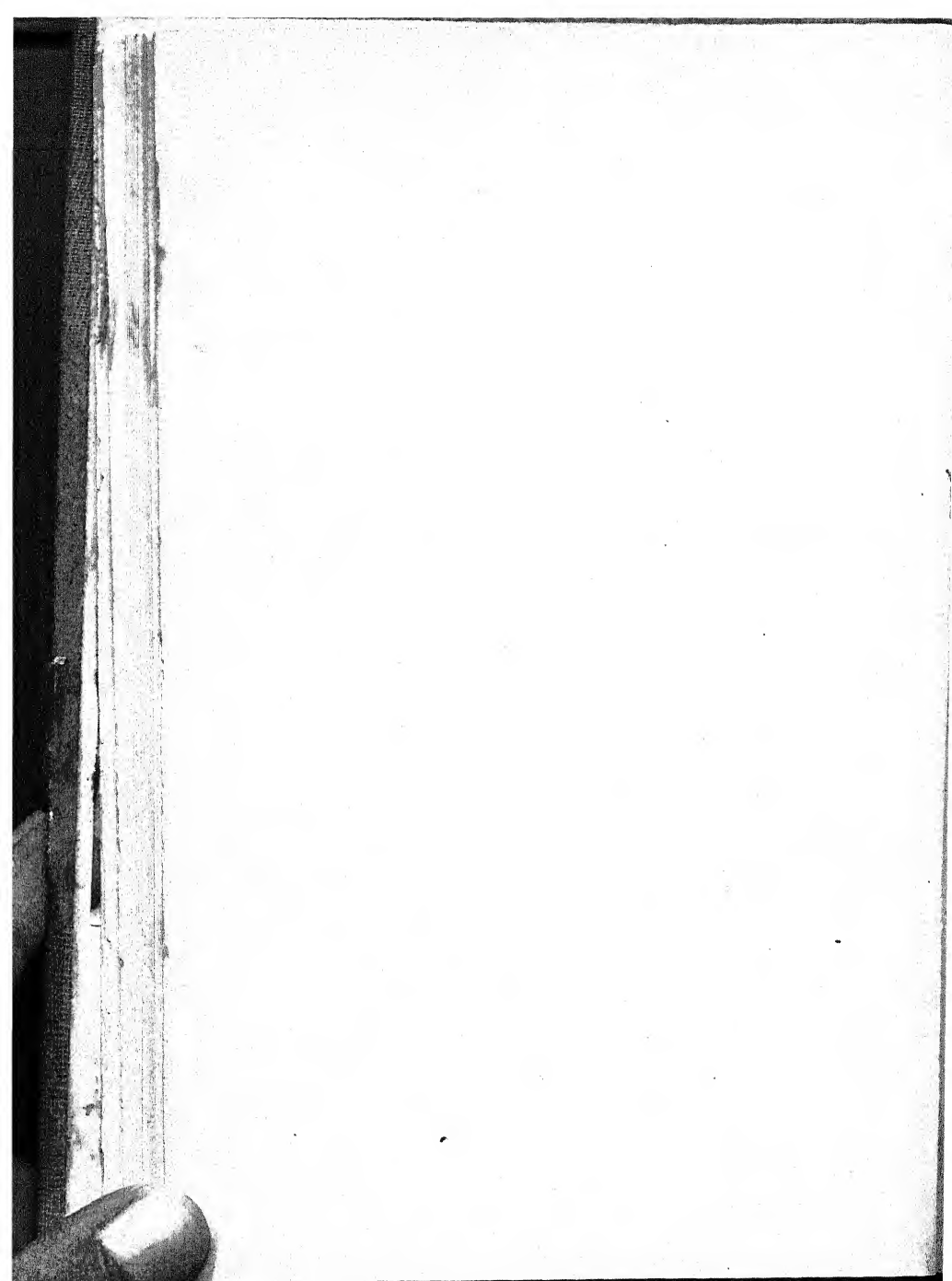
"Partly, monsieur," replied Danecamp.

"Here are twenty pistoles. Begone, monsieur, and never forget to defend, as this time has been done, the true interests of the king."

"Yes, monsieur," said the man, bowing and pocketing the money. After which he went out. Scarcely had the door closed after him when Fouquet, who had remained motionless, advanced with a rapid step and stood be-



UNDER THE ROYAL OAK.



tween the abbé and Gourville. Both of them at the same time opened their mouths to speak to him. "No excuses," said he, "no recriminations against anybody. If I had not been a false friend I should not have confided to any one the care of delivering Lyodot and D'Eymeris. I alone am guilty; to me alone are reproaches and remorse due. Leave me, abbé."

"And yet, monsieur, you will not prevent me," replied the latter, "from endeavoring to find out the miserable fellow who has intervened to the advantage of M. Colbert in this so well-arranged affair; for, if it is good policy to love our friends dearly, I do not believe that is bad which consists in obstinately pursuing our enemies."

"A truce to policy, abbé; begone, I beg of you, and do not let me hear any more of you till I send for you; what we most need is circumspection and silence. You have a terrible example before you, gentlemen: no reprisals, I forbid them."

"There are no orders," grumbled the abbé, "which will prevent me from avenging a family affront upon the guilty person."

"And I," cried Fouquet, in that imperative tone to which one feels there is nothing to reply, "if you entertain one thought, one single thought, which is not the absolute expression of my will, I will have you cast into the Bastille two hours after that thought has manifested itself. Regulate your conduct accordingly, abbé."

The abbé colored and bowed. Fouquet made a sign to Gourville to follow him, and was already directing his steps towards his cabinet, when the usher announced with a loud voice: "Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Who is he," said Fouquet, negligently, to Gourville.

"An ex-lieutenant of his majesty's musketeers," replied Gourville, in the same tone. Fouquet did not even take the trouble to reflect, and resumed his walk. "I beg your

pardon, monseigneur!" said Gourville, "but I have remembered; this brave man has quitted the king's service, and probably comes to receive an installment of some pension or other."

"Devil take him!" said Fouquet, "why does he choose his opportunity so ill?"

"Permit me then, monseigneur, to announce your refusal to him; for he is one of my acquaintance, and is a man whom, in our present circumstances, it would be better to have as a friend than an enemy."

"Answer him as you please," said Fouquet.

"Eh! good Lord!" said the abbé, still full of malice, like an egotistical man; "tell him there is no money, particularly for musketeers."

But scarcely had the abbé uttered this imprudent speech, when the partly-open door was thrown back, and D'Artagnan appeared.

"Eh! Monsieur Fouquet," said he, "I was well aware there was no money for musketeers here. Therefore I did not come to obtain any, but to have it refused. That being done, receive my thanks. I give you good-day, and will go and seek it at M. Colbert's." And he went out, making an easy bow.

"Gourville," said Fouquet, "run after that man and bring him back." Gourville obeyed, and overtook D'Artagnan on the stairs.

D'Artagnan, hearing steps behind him, turned round and perceived Gourville. "*Mordieu!* my dear monsieur," said he, "these are sad lessons which you gentlemen of finance teach us;—I come to M. Fouquet to receive a sum accorded by his majesty, and I am received like a mendicant who comes to ask charity, or a thief who comes to steal a piece of plate."

"But you pronounced the name of M. Colbert, my dear M. d'Artagnan; you said you were going to M. Colbert's?"

"I certainly am going there, were it only to ask satisfaction of the people who try to burn houses, crying ' *Vive Colbert!* ' "

Gourville pricked up his ears. "Oh, oh!" said he, "you allude to what has just happened at the Grève?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And in what did that which has taken place concern you?"

"What! do you ask me whether it concerns me or does not concern me, if M. Colbert pleases to make a funeral-pile of my house?"

"So ho, *your* house—was it *your* house they wanted to burn!"

"*Pardieu!* was it!"

"Is the *cabaret* of the Image-de-Notre-Dame yours, then?"

"It has been this week."

"Well, then, are you the brave captain, are you the valiant blade who dispersed those who wished to burn the condemned?"

"My dear Monsieur Gourville, put yourself in my place. I was an agent of the public force and a landlord, too. As a captain, it is my duty to have the orders of the king accomplished. As a proprietor, it is to my interest my house should not be burnt. I have at the same time attended to the laws of interest and duty in replacing Messrs. Lyodot and D'Eymeris in the hands of the archers."

"Then it was you who threw the man out of the window?"

"It was I, myself," replied D'Artagnan, modestly.

"And you who killed Menneville?"

"I had that misfortune," said D'Artagnan, bowing like a man who is being congratulated.

"It was you then, in short, who caused the two condemned persons to be hung?"

"Instead of being burnt, yes, monsieur, and I am proud of it. I saved the poor devils from horrible tortures. Understand, my dear Monsieur de Gourville, that they wanted to burn them alive? It exceeds imagination!"

"Go, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, go," said Gourville, anxious to spare Fouquet the sight of the man who had just caused him such profound grief.

"No," said Fouquet, who had heard all from the door of the antechamber; "not so; on the contrary, Monsieur d'Artagnan, come in."

D'Artagnan wiped from the hilt of his sword a last bloody trace, which had escaped his notice, and returned. He then found himself face to face with these three men, whose countenances wore very different expressions. With the abbé it was anger, with Gourville stupor, with Fouquet it was dejection.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur le ministre," said D'Artagnan, "but my time is short; I have to go to the office of the intendant, to have an explanation with Monsieur Colbert, and to receive my quarter's pension."

"But, monsieur," said Fouquet, "there is money here." D'Artagnan looked at the superintendent with astonishment. "You have been answered inconsiderately, monsieur, I know, because I heard it;" said the minister; "a man of your merit ought to be known by everybody." D'Artagnan bowed. "Have you an order?" added Fouquet.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give it me, I will pay you myself; come with me." He made a sign to Gourville and the abbé, who remained in the chamber where they were. He led D'Artagnan into his cabinet. As soon as the door was shut, "How much is due to you, monsieur?"

"Why, something like five thousand livres, monseigneur."

"For arrears of pay?"

"For a quarter's pay."

"A quarter consisting of five thousand livres!" said Fouquet, fixing upon the musketeer a searching look. "Does the king, then, give you twenty thousand livres a year?"

"Yes, monseigneur, twenty thousand livres a year. Do you think it is too much?"

"I?" cried Fouquet, and he smiled bitterly. "If I had any knowledge of mankind, if I were—instead of being a frivolous, inconsequent, and vain spirit—of a prudent and reflective spirit; if, in a word, I had, as certain persons have known how, regulated my life, you would not receive twenty thousand livres a year, but a hundred thousand, and you would not belong to the king but to me."

D'Artagnan colored slightly. There is sometimes in the manner in which an eulogium is given, in the voice, in the affectionate tone, a poison so sweet, that the strongest mind is intoxicated by it. The superintendent terminated his speech by opening a drawer, and taking from it four *rouleaux*, which he placed before D'Artagnan. The Gascon opened one. "Gold!" said he.

"It will be less burdensome, monsieur."

"But then, monsieur, these make twenty thousand livres."

"No doubt they do."

"But only five are due to me."

"I wish to spare you the trouble of coming four times to my office."

"You overwhelm me, monsieur."

"I do only what I ought to do, monsieur le chevalier; and I hope you will not bear me any malice on account of the rude reception my brother gave you. He is of a sour, capricious disposition."

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "believe me, nothing would grieve me more than an excuse from you."

"Therefore I will make no more, and will content myself with asking you a favor."

"Oh, monsieur."

Fouquet drew from his finger a ring worth about a thousand pistoles. "Monsieur," said he, "this stone was given me by a friend of my childhood, by a man to whom you have rendered a great service."

"A service—I?" said the musketeer; "I have rendered a service to one of your friends?"

"You cannot have forgotten it, monsieur, for it dates this very day."

"And that friend's name was——?"

"M. d'Eymeris."

"One of the condemned?"

"Yes, one of the victims. Well! Monsieur d'Artagnan, in return for the service you have rendered him, I beg you to accept this diamond. Do so for my sake."

"Monsieur! you——"

"Accept it, I say. To-day is with me a day of mourning; hereafter you will, perhaps, learn why; to-day I have lost one friend; well, I will try to get another."

"But, Monsieur Fouquet——"

"Adieu! Monsieur d'Artagnan, adieu!" cried Fouquet, with much emotion; "or rather, *au revoir*." And the minister quitted the cabinet, leaving in the hands of the musketeer the ring and the twenty thousand livres.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, after a moment's dark reflection. "How on earth am I to understand what this means? *Mordieu!* I can understand this much, only: he is a gallant man! I will go and explain matters to M. Colbert." And he went out.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE NOTABLE DIFFERENCE D'ARTAGNAN FINDS BETWEEN
MONSIEUR THE INTENDANT AND MONSIEUR THE SUPERIN-
TENDENT.

M. COLBERT resided in the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs, in a house which had belonged to Beautru. D'Artagnan's legs cleared the distance in a short quarter of an hour. When he arrived at the residence of the new favorite, the court was full of archers and police, who came to congratulate him, or to excuse themselves, according to whether he should choose to praise or blame. The sentiment of flattery is instinctive with people of abject condition; they have the sense of it, as the wild animal has that of hearing and smell. These people, or their leader, understood that there was a pleasure to offer to M. Colbert, in rendering him an account of the fashion in which his name had been pronounced during the rash enterprise of the morning. D'Artagnan made his appearance just as the chief of the watch was giving his report. He stood close to the door, behind the archers. That officer took Colbert on one side, in spite of his resistance and the contraction of his bushy eyebrows. "In case," said he, "you really desired, monsieur, that the people should do justice on the two traitors, it would have been wise to warn us of it; for, indeed, monsieur, in spite of our regret at displeasing you, or thwarting your views, we had our orders to execute."

"Triple fool!" replied Colbert, furiously shaking his hair, thick and black as a mane; "what are you telling

me? What! that I could have had an idea of a riot! Are you mad or drunk?"

"But, monsieur, they cried '*Vive* Colbert!'" replied the trembling watch.

"A handful of conspirators——"

"No, no; a mass of people."

"Ah! indeed," said Colbert, expanding. "A mass of people cried, '*Vive* Colbert!' Are you certain of what you say, monsieur?"

"We had nothing to do but open our ears, or rather to close them, so terrible were the cries."

"And this was from the people, the real people?"

"Certainly, monsieur; only these real people beat us."

"Oh! very well," continued Colbert, thoughtfully. "Then you suppose it was the people alone who wished to burn the condemned?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur."

"That is quite another thing. You strongly resisted, then?"

"We had three of our men crushed to death, monsieur!"

"But you killed nobody yourselves?"

"Monsieur, a few of the rioters were left upon the square, and one among them who was not a common man."

"Who was he?"

"A certain Menneville, upon whom the police have a long time had an eye."

"Menneville!" cried Colbert, "what, he who killed Rue de la Huchette, a worthy man who wanted a fat fowl?"

"Yes, monsieur; the same."

"And did this Menneville also cry, '*Vive* Colbert!'"

"Louder than all the rest; like a madman."

Colbert's brow grew dark and wrinkled. A kind of ambitious glory which had lighted his face was extin-

guished, like the light of glow-worms we crush beneath the grass. "Then you say," resumed the deceived intendant, "that the initiative came from the people? Menneville was my enemy; I would have had him hung, and he knew it well. Menneville belonged to the Abbé Fouquet—the affair originated with Fouquet; does not everybody know that the condemned were his friends from childhood?"

"That is true," thought D'Artagnan, "and thus are all my doubts cleared up. I repeat it, Monsieur Fouquet may be called what they please, but he is a very gentlemanly man."

"And," continued Colbert, "are you quite sure Menneville is dead?"

D'Artagnan thought the time was come for him to make his appearance. "Perfectly, monsieur;" replied he, advancing suddenly.

"Oh! is that you, monsieur?" said Colbert.

"In person," replied the musketeer with his deliberate tone; "it appears that you had in Menneville a pretty enemy."

"It was not I, monsieur, who had an enemy," replied Colbert; "it was the king."

"Double brute!" thought D'Artagnan, "to think to play the great man and the hypocrite with me. Well," continued he to Colbert, "I am very happy to have rendered so good a service to the king; will you take upon you to tell his majesty, monsieur l'intendant?"

"What commission is this you give me, and what do you charge me to tell his majesty, monsieur? Be precise, if you please," said Colbert, in a sharp voice, tuned beforehand to hostility.

"I give you no commission," replied D'Artagnan, with that calmness which never abandons the banterer; "I thought it would be easy for you to announce to his majesty that it was I who, being there by chance, did

justice upon Menneville and restored things to order."

Colbert opened his eyes and interrogated the chief of the watch with a look—"Ah! it is very true," said the latter, "that this gentleman saved us."

"Why did you not tell me, monsieur, that you came to relate me this?" said Colbert with envy; "everything is explained, and more favorably for you than for any body else."

"You are in error, monsieur l'intendant, I did not at all come for the purpose of relating that to you."

"It is an exploit, nevertheless."

"Oh!" said the musketeer carelessly, "constant habit blunts the mind."

"To what do I owe the honor of your visit, then!"

"Simply to this: the king ordered me to come to you."

"Ah!" said Colbert, recovering himself, when he saw D'Artagnan draw a paper from his pocket; "it is to demand some money of me?"

"Precisely, Monsieur."

"Have the goodness to wait, if you please, monsieur, till I have dispatched the report of the watch."

D'Artagnan turned upon his heel, insolently enough, and finding himself face to face with Colbert, after his first turn, he bowed to him as a harlequin would have done; then, after a second evolution, he directed his steps towards the door in quick time. Colbert was struck with this pointed rudeness, to which he was not accustomed. In general, men of the sword, when they came to his office, had such a want of money, that though their feet seemed to take root in the marble, they hardly lost their patience. Was D'Artagnan going straight to the king? Would he go and describe his rough reception, or recount his exploit? This was a matter for grave consideration. At all events, the moment was badly chosen to send D'Artagnan away, whether he came from the king, or on his

own account. The musketeer had rendered too great a service, and that too recently, for it to be already forgotten. Therefore Colbert thought it would be better to shake off his arrogance and call D'Artagnan back. "Ho! Monsieur D'Artagnan," cried Colbert, "what! are you leaving me thus?"

D'Artagnan turned round: "Why not?" said he, quietly, "we have no more to say to each other, have we?"

"You have at least money to receive, as you have an order?"

"Who, I? Oh! not at all, my dear Monsieur Colbert."

"But, monsieur, you have an order. And, in the same manner as you give a sword-thrust, when you are required, I, on my part, pay when an order is presented to me. Present yours."

"It is useless, my dear Monsieur Colbert," said D'Artagnan, who inwardly enjoyed this confusion in the ideas of Colbert; "my order is paid."

"Paid, by whom?"

"By monsieur le surintendant."

Colbert grew pale.

"Explain yourself," said he, in a stifled voice—"if you are paid why do you show me that paper?"

"In consequence of the word of order of which you spoke to me so ingeniously just now, dear M. Colbert; the king told me to take a quarter of the pension he is pleased to make me."

"Of me?" said Colbert.

"Not exactly. The king said to me: 'Go to M. Fouquet; the superintendent will, perhaps, have no money, then you will go and draw it of M. Colbert.'"

The countenance of M. Colbert brightened for a moment; but it was with his unfortunate physiognomy as with a stormy sky, sometimes radiant, sometimes dark as night,

according as the lightning-gleams or the cloud passes. "Eh! and was there any money in the superintendent's coffers?" asked he.

"Why, yes, he could not be badly off for money," replied D'Artagnan—"it may be believed, since M. Fouquet, instead of paying me a quarter or five thousand livres——"

"A quarter or five thousand livres!" cried Colbert, struck, as Fouquet had been, with the generosity of the sum for a soldier's pension, "why, that would be a pension of twenty thousand livres?"

"Exactly, M. Colbert. *Peste!* you reckon like old Pythagoras; yes, twenty thousand livres."

"Ten times the appointment of an intendant of the finances. I beg to offer you my compliments," said Colbert, with a vicious smile.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "the king apologized for giving me so little; but he promised to make it more hereafter, when he should be rich; but I must be gone, having much to do——"

"So, then, notwithstanding the expectation of the king, the superintendent paid you, did he?"

"In the same manner as, in opposition to the king's expectation, you refused to pay me."

"I did not refuse, monsieur, I only begged you to wait. And you say that M. Fouquet paid you your five thousand livres?"

"Yes, as *you* might have done; but he did even better than that, M. Colbert."

"And what did he do?"

"He politely counted me down the sum-total, saying, that for the king, his coffers were always full."

"The sum-total! M. Fouquet has given you twenty thousand livres instead of five thousand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And what for?"

"In order to spare me three visits to the money-chest of the superintendent, so that I have the twenty thousand livres in my pocket in good new coin. You see, then, that I am able to go away without standing in need of you, having come here only for form's sake." And D'Artagnan slapped his hand upon his pocket, with a laugh which disclosed to Colbert thirty-two magnificent teeth, as white as teeth of twenty-five years old, and which seemed to say in their language: "Serve up to us thirty-two little Colberts, and we will chew them willingly." The serpent is as brave as the lion, the hawk as courageous as the eagle, that cannot be contested. It can only be said of animals that are decidedly cowardly, and are so called, that they will be brave only when they have to defend themselves. Colbert was not frightened at the thirty-two teeth of D'Artagnan. He recovered, and suddenly,—"Monsieur," said he, "monsieur le surintendant has done what he had no right to do."

"What do you mean by that?" replied D'Artagnan.

"I mean that your note—will you let me see your note, if you please?"

"Very willingly; here it is."

Colbert seized the paper with an eagerness which the musketeer did not remark without uneasiness, and particularly without a certain degree of regret at having trusted him with it. "Well, monsieur, the royal order says this:—'At sight, I command that there be paid to M. d'Artagnan the sum of five thousand livres, forming a quarter of the pension I have made him.'"

"So, in fact, it is written," said D'Artagnan, affecting calmness.

"Very well; the king only owed you five thousand livres; why has more been given to you?"

"Because there was more; and M. Fouquet was willing to give me more; that does not concern anybody."

"It is natural," said Colbert, with a proud ease, "that you should be ignorant of the usages of state-finance; but, monsieur, when you have a thousand livres to pay, what do you do?"

"I never have a thousand livres to pay," replied D'Artagnan.

"Once more," said Colbert, irritated—"once more, if you had any sum to pay, would you not pay what you ought?"

"That only proves one thing," said D'Artagnan; "and that is, that you have your particular customs in finance, and M. Fouquet has his own."

"Mine, monsieur, are the correct ones."

"I do not say they are not."

"And you have accepted what was not due to you."

D'Artagnan's eyes flashed. "What is not due to me *yet*, you meant to say, M. Colbert; for if I had received what was not due to me at all, I should have committed a theft."

Colbert made no reply to this subtlety. "You then owe fifteen thousand livres to the public chest," said he, carried away by his jealous ardor.

"Then you must give me credit for them," replied D'Artagnan, with his imperceptible irony.

"Not at all, monsieur."

"Well! what will you do, then? You will not take my *rouleaux* from me, will you?"

"You must return them to my chest."

"I! Oh! Monsieur Colbert, don't reckon upon that."

"The king wants his money, monsieur."

"And I, monsieur, I want the king's money."

"That may be; but you must return this."

"Not a *sou*. I have always understood that in matters of *comptabilité*, as you call it, a good cashier never gives back or takes back."

"Then, monsieur, we shall see what the king will say about it. I will show him this note, which proves that M. Fouquet not only pays what he does not owe, but that he does not even take care of vouchers for the sums that he has paid."

"Ah! now I understand why you have taken that paper, M. Colbert!"

Colbert did not perceive all that there was of a threatening character in his name pronounced in a certain manner. "You shall see hereafter what use I will make of it," said he, holding up the paper in his fingers.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, snatching the paper from him with a rapid movement; "I understand it perfectly well, M. Colbert; I have no occasion to wait for that." And he crumpled up in his pocket the paper he had so cleverly seized.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" cried Colbert, "this is violence!"

"Nonsense! You must not be particular about a soldier's manners!" replied D'Artagnan. "I kiss your hands, my dear M. Colbert." And he went out, laughing in the face of the future minister.

"That man, now," muttered he, "was about to grow quite friendly; it is a great pity I was obliged to cut his company so soon."

CHAPTER IX.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEART AND MIND.

FOR a man who had seen so many much more dangerous ones, the position of D'Artagnan with respect to M. Colbert was only comic. D'Artagnan, therefore, did not

deny himself the satisfaction of laughing at the expense of monsieur l'intendant, from the Rue des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards. It was a great while since D'Artagnan had laughed so long together. He was still laughing when Planchet appeared, laughing likewise, at the door of his house; for Planchet, since the return of his patron, since the entrance of the English guineas, passed the greater part of his life in doing what D'Artagnan had only done from Rue-Neuve des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards.

"You are home, then, my dear master?" said Planchet.

"No, my friend," replied the musketeer; "I am off, and that quickly. I will sup with you, go to bed, sleep five hours, and at break of day leap into my saddle. Has my horse had an extra feed?"

"Eh! my dear master," replied Planchet, "you know very well that your horse is the jewel of the family; that my lads are caressing it all day, and cramming it with sugar, nuts, and biscuits. You ask me if he has had an extra feed of oats; you should ask if he has not had enough to burst him."

"Very well, Planchet, that is all right. Now, then, I pass to what concerns me—my supper?"

"Ready. A smoking roast joint, white wine, crayfish, and fresh-gathered cherries. All ready, my master."

"You are a capital fellow, Planchet; come on, then, let us sup, and I will go to bed."

During supper D'Artagnan observed that Planchet kept rubbing his forehead, as if to facilitate the issue of some idea closely pent within his brain. He looked with an air of kindness at this worthy companion of former adventures and misadventures, and, clinking glass against glass, "Come, Planchet," said he, "let us see what it is that gives you so much trouble to bring forth. *Mordious!* speak freely, and quickly."

"Well, this is it," replied Planchet: "you appear to me to be going on some expedition or other."

"I don't say that I am not."

"Then you have some new idea?"

"That is possible, too, Planchet."

"Then there will be fresh capital to be ventured? I will lay down fifty thousand livres upon the idea you are about to carry out." And so saying, Planchet rubbed his hands one against the other with a rapidity evincing great delight.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "there is but one misfortune in it."

"And what is that?"

"That the idea is not mine. I can risk nothing upon it."

These words drew a deep sigh from the heart of Planchet. That Avarice is an ardent counselor; she carries away her man, as Satan did Jesus, to the mountain, and when once she has shown to an unfortunate all the kingdoms of the earth, she is able to repose herself, knowing full well that she has left her companion Envy to gnaw his heart. Planchet had tasted of riches easily acquired, and was never afterwards likely to stop in his desires; but as he had a good heart in spite of his covetousness, as he adored D'Artagnan, he could not refrain from making him a thousand recommendations, each more affectionate than the others. He would not have been sorry, nevertheless, to have caught a little hint of the secret his master concealed so well; tricks, turns, counsels and traps were all useless, D'Artagnan let nothing confidential escape him. The evening passed thus. After supper the portmanteau occupied D'Artagnan, he took a turn to the stable, patted his horse, and examined his shoes and legs; then, having counted over his money, he went to bed, sleeping as if only twenty, because he had

neither inquietude nor remorse; he closed his eyes five minutes after he had blown out his lamp. Many events might, however, have kept him awake. Thought boiled in his brain, conjectures abounded, and D'Artagnan was a great drawer of horoscopes; but, with that imperturbable phlegm which does more than genius for the fortune and happiness of men of action, he put off reflection till the next day, for fear, he said, not to be fresh when he wanted to be so.

The day came. The Rue des Lombards had its share of the caresses of Aurora with the rosy fingers, and D'Artagnan arose like Aurora. He did not awaken anybody, he placed his portmanteau under his arm, descended the stairs without making one of them creak, and without disturbing one of the sonorous snorings in every story from the garret to the cellar, then, having saddled his horse, shut the stable and house doors, he set off, at a foot-pace, on his expedition to Bretagne. He had done quite right not to trouble himself with all the political and diplomatic affairs which solicited his attention; for, in the morning, in freshness and mild twilight, his ideas developed themselves in purity and abundance. In the first place, he passed before the house Fouquet, and threw in a large gaping box the fortunate order which, the evening before, he had had so much trouble to recover from the hooked fingers of the intendant. Placed in an envelope, and addressed to Fouquet, it had not even been divined by Planchet, who in divination was equal to Calchas or the Pythian Apollo. D'Artagnan thus sent back the order to Fouquet, without compromising himself, and without having thenceforward any reproaches to make himself. When he had effected this proper restitution, "Now," said he to himself, "let us inhale much maternal air, much freedom from cares, much health, let us allow the horse Zephyr, whose flanks puff as if he had to respire an atmosphere, to

breathe, and let us be very ingenious in our little calculations. It is time," said D'Artagnan, "to form a plan of the campaign, and, according to the method of M. Turenne, who has a large head full of all sorts of good counsels, before the plan of the campaign it is advisable to draw a striking portrait of the generals to whom we are opposed. In the first place, M. Fouquet presents himself. What is M. Fouquet?—M. Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan to himself "is a handsome man very much beloved by the women, a generous man very much beloved by the poets; a man of wit, much execrated by pretenders. Well, now I am neither woman, poet, nor pretender: I neither love nor hate monsieur le surintendant. I find myself, therefore, in the same position in which M. de Turenne found himself when opposed to the Prince de Condé at Jargeau, Gien and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He did not execrate monsieur le prince, it is true, but he obeyed the king. Monsieur le prince is an agreeable man, but the king is king. Turenne heaved a deep sigh, called Condé 'My cousin,' and swept away his army. Now what does the king wish?—That does not concern me. Now, what does M. Colbert wish?—Oh, that's another thing. M. Colbert wishes all that M. Fouquet does not wish. Then what does M. Fouquet wish?—Oh, that is serious.—M. Fouquet wishes precisely for all which the king wishes."

This monologue ended, D'Artagnan began to laugh, whilst making his whip whistle in the air. He was already on the high road, frightening the birds in the hedges, listening to the livres chinking and dancing in his leather pocket, at every step; and, let us confess it, every time that D'Artagnan found himself in such conditions, tenderness was not his dominant vice. "Come," said he, "I cannot think the expedition a very dangerous one; and it will fall out with my voyage as with that piece M. Monk took me to see in London, which was called, I think, 'Much Ado about Nothing.'"

CHAPTER X.

THE JOURNEY.

It was perhaps the fiftieth time since the day on which we open this history, that this man, with a heart of bronze and muscles of steel, had left house and friends, everything, in short, to go in search of fortune and death. The one—that is to say, death—had constantly retreated before him, as if afraid of him; the other—that is to say, fortune—for a month past only had really made an alliance with him. Although he was not a great philosopher, after the fashion of either Epicurus or Socrates, he was a powerful spirit, having knowledge of life, and endowed with thought. No one is as brave, as adventurous, or as skillful as D'Artagnan, without being at the same time inclined to be a *dreamer*. He had picked up, here and there, some scraps of M. de la Rochefoucault, worthy of being translated into Latin by MM. de Port Royal; and he had made a collection, *en passant*, in the society of Athos and Aramis, of many morsels of Seneca and Cicero, translated by them, and applied to the uses of common life. That contempt of riches which our Gascon had observed as an article of faith during the thirty-five first years of his life, had for a long time been considered by him as the first article of the code of bravery. "Article first," said he, "A man is brave because he has nothing. A man has nothing because he despises riches." Therefore, with these principles, which, as we have said, had regulated the thirty-five first years of his life, D'Artagnan was no sooner possessed of riches, than he felt it necessary to ask himself if, in spite of his

riches, he were still brave. To this, for any other but D'Artagnan, the events of the Place de Grève might have served as a reply. Many consciences would have been satisfied with them, but D'Artagnan was brave enough to ask himself sincerely and conscientiously if he were brave. Therefore to this :—

“But it appears to me that I drew promptly enough, and cut and thrust pretty freely on the Place de Grève, to be satisfied of my bravery,” D'Artagnan had himself replied. “Gently, captain, that is not an answer. I was brave that day, because they were burning my house, and there are a hundred, and even a thousand, to speak against one, that if those gentlemen of the riots had not formed that unlucky idea, their plan of attack would have succeeded, or, at least, it would not have been I who would have opposed myself to it. Now, what will be brought against me? I have no house to be burnt in Bretagne; I have no treasure there that can be taken from me.—No; but I have my skin; that precious skin of M. d'Artagnan, which to him is worth more than all the houses and all the treasures of the world. That skin to which I cling above everything, because it is, everything considered, the binding of a body which incloses a heart very warm and ready to fight, and, consequently, to live. Then, I do desire to live: and, in reality, I live much better, more completely, since I have become rich. Who the devil ever said that money spoiled life! Upon my soul, it is no such thing, on the contrary, it seems as if I absorbed a double quantity of air and sun. *Mordieux*, what will it be then, if I double that fortune; and if, instead of the switch I now hold in my hand, I should ever carry the bâton of a maréchal? Then I really don't know if there will be, from that moment, enough of air and sun for me. In fact, this is not a dream, who the devil would oppose it, if the king made me a maréchal, as his father, King Louis XIII., made a duke and constable

of Albert de Luyes? Am I not as brave, and much more intelligent, than that imbecile de Vitry? Ah! that's exactly what will prevent my advancement: I have too much wit. Luckily, if there is any justice in this world, fortune owes me many compensations. She owes me certainly, a recompense for all I did for Anne of Austria, and an indemnification for all she has not done for me. Then, at the present, I am very well with a king, and with a king who has the appearance of determining to reign. May God keep him in that illustrious road! For, if he is resolved to reign, he will want me; and if he wants me, he will give me what he has promised me—warmth and light; so that I march, comparatively, now, as I marched formerly,—from nothing to everything. Only the nothing of to-day is the all of former days; there has only this little change taken place in my life. And now let us see! let us take the part of the heart, as I just now was speaking of it. But in truth, I only spoke of it from memory.” And the Gascon applied his hand to his breast, as if he were actually seeking the place where his heart was.

“Ah! wretch!” murmured he, smiling with bitterness. “Ah! poor mortal species! You hoped, for an instant, that you had not a heart, and now you find you have one—bad courtier as thou art,—and even one of the most seditious. You have a heart which speaks to you in favor of M. Fouquet. And what is M. Fouquet, when the king is in question?—A conspirator, a real conspirator, who did not even give himself the trouble to conceal his being a conspirator; therefore, what a weapon would you not have against him, if his good grace, and his intelligence had not made a scabbard for that weapon. An armed revolt!—for, in fact, M. Fouquet has been guilty of an armed revolt. Thus, while the king vaguely suspects M. Fouquet of rebellion, I know it—I could prove that M. Fouquet had caused the shedding of the blood of his majesty's

subjects. Now, then, let us see? Knowing all that, and holding my tongue, what further would this heart wish in return for a kind action of M. Fouquet's, for an advance of fifteen thousand livres, for a diamond worth a thousand pistoles, for a smile in which there was as much bitterness as kindness?—I save his life."

"Now, then, I hope," continued the musketeer, "that this imbecile of a heart is going to preserve silence, and so be fairly quits with M. Fouquet. Now, then, the king becomes my sun, and as my heart is quits with M. Fouquet, let him beware who places himself between me and my sun! Forward, for his majesty Louis XIV.!—Forward!"

These reflections were the only impediments which were able to retard the progress of D'Artagnan. These reflections once made, he increased the speed of his horse. But, however perfect his horse Zephyr might be, it could not hold out at such a pace forever. The day after his departure from Paris, he was left at Chartres, at the house of an old friend D'Artagnan had met with in an *hôtelier* of that city. From that moment, the musketeer traveled on post-horses. Thanks to this mode of locomotion, he traversed the space separating Chartres from Châteaubriand. In the last of these two cities, far enough from the coast to prevent any one guessing that D'Artagnan wished to reach the sea—far enough from Paris to prevent all suspicion of his being a messenger from Louis XIV., whom D'Artagnan had called his sun, without suspecting that he who was only at present a rather poor star in the heaven of royalty, would, one day, make that star his emblem; the messenger of Louis XIV., we say, quitted the post and purchased a *bidet* of the meanest appearance,—one of those animals which an officer of cavalry would never choose, for fear of being disgraced. Excepting the color, this new acquisition recalled to the mind of

D'Artagnan the famous orange-colored horse with which, or rather upon which, he had made his first appearance in the world. Truth to say, from the moment he crossed this new steed, it was no longer D'Artagnan who was traveling,—it was a good man clothed in an iron-gray *justaucorps*, brown *haut-de-chausses*, holding the medium between a priest and a layman; that which brought him nearest to the churchman was, that D'Artagnan had placed on his head a *calotte* of threadbare velvet, and over the *calotte*, a large black hat; no more sword, a stick, hung by a cord to his wrist, but to which, he promised himself, as an unexpected auxiliary, to join, upon occasion, a good dagger, ten inches long, concealed under his cloak. The *bidet* purchased at Châteaubriand completed the metamorphosis; it was called, or rather D'Artagnan called it, Furet (ferret).

"If I have changed Zephyr into Furet," said D'Artagnan, "I must make some diminutive or other of my own name. So, instead of D'Artagnan, I will be Agnan, short; that is a concession which I naturally owe to my gray coat, my round hat, and my rusty *calotte*."

Monsieur d'Artagnan traveled, then, pretty easily upon Furet, who ambled like a true butter-woman's pad, and who, with his amble, managed cheerfully about twelve leagues a day, upon four spindle-shanks, of which the practiced eye of D'Artagnan had appreciated the strength and safety beneath the thick mass of hair which covered them. Jogging along, the traveler took notes, studied the country, which he traversed reserved and silent, ever seeking the most plausible pretext for reaching Belle-Isle-en-Mer, and for seeing everything without arousing suspicion. In this manner, he was enabled to convince himself of the importance the event assumed in proportion as he drew near to it. In this remote country, in this ancient duchy of Bretagne, which was not France at

that period, and is not so even now, the people knew nothing of the king of France. They not only did not know him, but were unwilling to know him. One face—a single one—floated visibly for them upon the political current. Their ancient dukes no longer ruled them; government was a void—nothing more. In place of the sovereign duke, the seigneurs of parishes reigned without control; and, above these seigneurs, God, who has never been forgotten in Bretagne. Among these suzerains of châteaux and belfries, the most powerful, the richest, and the most popular, was M. Fouquet, seigneur of Belle-Isle. Even in the country, even within sight of that mysterious isle, legends and traditions consecrate its wonders. Every one might not penetrate it: the isle, of an extent of six leagues in length, and six in breadth, was a seignorial property, which the people had for a long time respected, covered as it was with the name of Retz, so redoubtable in the country. Shortly after the erection of this seigniory into a marquisate, Belle-Isle passed to M. Fouquet. The celebrity of the isle did not date from yesterday; its name, or rather its qualification, is traced back to the remotest antiquity. The ancients called it *Kalonèse*, from two Greek words, signifying beautiful isle. Thus, at a distance of eighteen hundred years, it had borne, in another idiom, the same name it still bears. There was, then, something in itself in this property of M. Fouquet's, besides its position of six leagues off the coast of France; a position which makes it a sovereign in its maritime solitude, like a majestic ship which disdains roads, and proudly casts anchor in mid-ocean.

D'Artagnan learnt all this without appearing the least in the world astonished. He also learnt that the best way to get intelligence was to go to La Roche-Bernard, a tolerably important city at the mouth of the Vilaine. Perhaps there he could embark; if not, crossing the salt

marshes, he would repair to Guérande-en-Croisic, to wait for an opportunity to cross over to Belle-Isle. He had discovered, besides, since his departure from Châteaubriand, that nothing would be impossible for Furet under the impulsion of M. Agnan, and nothing to M. Agnan through the initiative of Furet. He prepared, then, to sup off a teal and a *tourteau*, in a hotel of La Roche Bernard, and ordered to be brought from the cellar, to wash down these two Breton dishes, some cider, which, the moment it touched his lips, he perceived to be more Breton still.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH A POET, WHO
HAD TURNED PRINTER FOR THE SAKE OF PRINTING HIS
OWN VERSES.

BEFORE taking his place at table, D'Artagnan acquired, as was his custom, all the information he could; but it is an axiom of curiosity, that every man who wishes to question well and fruitfully ought in the first place to lay himself open to questions. D'Artagnan sought, then, with his usual skill, a promising questioner in the hostelry of La Roche-Bernard. At the moment, there were in the house, on the first story, two travelers either preparing for supper, or at supper itself. D'Artagnan had seen their nags in the stable, and their equipages in the *salle*. One traveled with a lackey, undoubtedly a person of consideration;—two Perche mares, sleek, sound beasts, were suitable means of locomotion. The other, a little fellow, a traveler of meagre appearance, wearing a dusty surtout, dirty linen, and boots more worn by the pavement than the stifrup, had come from Nantes with a cart

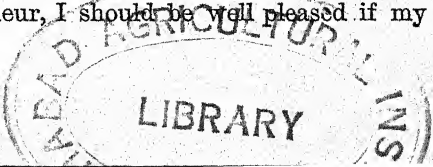
drawn by a horse so like Furet in color, that D'Artagnan might have gone a hundred miles without finding a better match. This cart contained divers large packets wrapped in pieces of old stuff.

"That traveler yonder," said D'Artagnan to himself, "is the man for my money. He will do, he suits me; I ought to do for and suit him; M. Agnan, with the gray doublet and the rusty *calotte*, is not unworthy of supping with the gentleman of the old boots and still older horse."

This said, D'Artagnan called the host, and desired him to send his teal, *tourteau*, and cider up to the chamber of the gentleman of modest exterior. He himself climbed, a plate in his hand, the wooden staircase which led to the chamber, and began to knock at the door.

"Come in!" said the unknown. D'Artagnan entered, with a simper on his lips, his plate under his arm, his hat in one hand, his candle in the other.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he, "I am, as you are, a traveler; I know no one in the hotel, and I have the bad habit of losing my spirits when I eat alone; so that my repast appears a bad one to me, and does not nourish me. Your face, which I saw just now, when you came down to have some oysters opened,—your face pleased me much. Besides, I have observed you have a horse just like mine, and that the host, no doubt on account of that resemblance, has placed them side by side in the stable, where they appear to agree amazingly well together. I therefore, monsieur, do not see any reason why the masters should be separated when the horses are united. Accordingly, I am come to request the pleasure of being admitted to your table. My name is Agnan, at your service, monsieur, the unworthy steward of a rich seigneur, who wishes to purchase some salt-mines in this country, and sends me to examine his future acquisitions. In truth, monsieur, I should be well pleased if my counte-



nance were as agreeable to you as yours is to me ; for, upon my honor, I am quite at your service."

The stranger, whom D'Artagnan saw for the first time, —for before he had only caught a glimpse of him,—the stranger had black and brilliant eyes, a yellow complexion, a brow a little wrinkled by the weight of fifty years, *bonhomie* in his features collectively, but some cunning in his look.

"One would say," thought D'Artagnan, "that this merry fellow has never exercised more than the upper part of his head, his eyes, and his brain. He must be a man of science: his mouth, nose, and chin signify absolutely nothing."

"Monsieur," replied the latter, with whose mind and person we have been making so free, "you do me much honor; not that I am ever *ennuyé*, for I have," added he, smiling, "a company which amuses me always; but, never mind that, I am very happy to receive you." But when saying this, the man with the worn boots cast an uneasy look at his table, from which the oysters had disappeared, and upon which there was nothing left but a morsel of salt bacon.

"Monsieur," D'Artagnan hastened to say, "the host is bringing me up a pretty piece of roasted poultry and a superb *tourteau*." D'Artagnan had read in the look of his companion, however rapid it disappeared, the fear of an attack by a parasite: he divined justly. At this opening, the features of the man of modest exterior relaxed; and, as if he had watched the moment for his entrance, as D'Artagnan spoke, the host appeared, bearing the announced dishes. The *tourteau* and the teal were added to the morsel of broiled bacon; D'Artagnan and his guest bowed, sat down opposite to each other, and, like two brothers, shared the bacon and the other dishes.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must confess that association is a wonderful thing."

"How so?" replied the stranger, with his mouth full.

"Well, I will tell you," replied D'Artagnan.

The stranger gave a short truce to the movement of his jaws, in order to hear the better.

"In the first place," continued D'Artagnan, "instead of one candle, which each of us had, we have two."

"That is true!" said the stranger, struck with the extreme lucidity of the observation.

"Then I see that you eat my *tourteaux* in preference, whilst I, in preference, eat your bacon."

"That is true again."

"And then, in addition to being better lighted and eating what we prefer, I place the pleasure of your company."

"Truly, monsieur, you are very jovial," said the unknown, cheerfully.

"Yes, monsieur; jovial, as all people are who carry nothing on their minds, or, for that matter in their heads. Oh! I can see it is quite another sort of thing with you," continued D'Artagnan; "I can read in your eyes all sorts of genius."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Come, confess one thing."

"What is that?"

"That you are a learned man."

"*Ma foi!* monsieur."

"*Hein?*"

"Almost."

"Come, then!"

"I am an author."

"There!" cried D'Artagnan, clapping his hands, "I knew I could not be deceived! It is a miracle!"

"Monsieur——"

"What! shall I have the honor of passing the evening in the society of an author, of a celebrated author, perhaps?"

"Oh!" said the unknown, blushing, "celebrated, monsieur, celebrated is not the word."

"Modest!" cried D'Artagnan, transported, "he is modest!" Then, turning towards the stranger, with a character of blunt *bonhomie*: "But tell me at least the name of your works, monsieur; for you will please to observe you have not told me your name, and I have been forced to divine your genius."

"My name is Jupenet, monsieur," said the author.

"A fine name! a grand name! upon my honor; and I do not know why—pardon me the mistake, if it be one—but surely I have heard that name somewhere."

"I have made verses," said the poet, modestly.

"Ah! that is it, then; I have heard them read."

"A tragedy."

"I must have seen it played."

The poet blushed again, and said: "I do not think that can be the case, for my verses have never been printed."

"Well, then, it must have been the tragedy which informed me of your name."

"You are again mistaken, for MM. the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, would have nothing to do with it," said the poet, with a smile, the receipt for which certain sorts of pride alone know the secret. D'Artagnan bit his lips. "Thus, then, you see, monsieur," continued the poet, "you are in error on my account, and that not being at all known to you, you have never heard tell of me."

"Ah! that confounds me. That name, Jupenet, appears to me, nevertheless, a fine name, and quite as worthy of being known as those of MM. Corneille, or Rotrou, or Garnier. I hope, monsieur, you will have the

goodness to repeat to me a part of your tragedy presently, by way of dessert, for instance. That will be sugared roast meat,—*mordious*! Ah! pardon me, monsieur, that was a little oath which escaped me, because it is a habit with my lord and master. I sometimes allow myself to usurp that little oath, as it seems in pretty good taste. I take this liberty only in his absence, please to observe, for you may understand that in his presence—but, in truth, monsieur, this cider is abominable; do you not think so? And besides, the pot is of such an irregular shape it will not stand on the table.”

“Suppose we were to make it level?”

“To be sure; but with what?”

“With this knife.”

“And the teal, with what shall we cut that up? Do you not, by chance, mean to touch the teal?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then——”

“Wait.”

And the poet rummaged in his pocket, and drew out a piece of brass, oblong, quadrangular, about a line in thickness, and an inch and a half in length. But scarcely had this little piece of brass seen the light, than the poet appeared to have committed an imprudence, and made a movement to put it back again in his pocket. D'Artagnan perceived this, for he was a man that nothing escaped. He stretched forth his hand towards the piece of brass: “Humph! that which you hold in your hand is pretty; will you allow me to look at it?”

“Certainly,” said the poet, who appeared to have yielded too soon to a first impulse. “Certainly, you may look at it: but it will be in vain for you to look at it,” added he, with a satisfied air; “if I were not to tell you its use, you would never guess it.”

D'Artagnan had seized as an avowal the hesitation of the poet, and his eagerness to conceal the piece of brass which a first movement had induced him to take out of his pocket. His attention, therefore once awakened on this point, he surrounded himself with a circumspection which gave him a superiority on all occasions. Besides, whatever M. Jupenet might say about it, by a simple inspection of the object, he perfectly well knew what it was. It was a character in printing.

"Can you guess, now, what this is?" continued the poet.

"No," said D'Artagnan, "no, *ma foi!*"

"Well, monsieur," said M. Jupenet, "this little piece of metal is a printing letter."

"Bah!"

"A capital."

"Stop, stop, stop," said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes very innocently.

"Yes, monsieur, a capital; the first letter of my name."

"And this is a letter, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, I will confess one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"No, I will not, I was going to say something stupid."

"No, no," said Master Jupenet, with a patronizing air.

"Well, then, I cannot comprehend, if that is a letter, how you can make a word."

"A word?"

"Yes, a printed word."

"Oh, that's very easy."

"Let me see."

"Does it interest you?"

"Enormously."

"Well, I will explain the thing to you. Attend."

"I am attending."

"That is it."

"Good."

"Look attentively."

"I am looking." D'Artagnan, in fact, appeared absorbed in observations. Jupenet drew from his pocket seven or eight other pieces of brass smaller than the first.

"Ah, ah," said D'Artagnan.

"What!"

"You have, then, a whole printing-office in your pocket. *Peste!* that is curious indeed."

"Is it not?"

"Good God, what a number of things we learn by traveling."

"To your health!" said Jupenet, quite enchanted.

"To yours, *mordieux*, to yours. But—an instant—not in this cider. It is an abominable drink, unworthy of a man who quenches his thirst at the Hippocrene fountain—is not it so you call your fountain, you poets?"

"Yes, monsieur, our fountain is so called. That comes from two Greek words—*hippos*, which means a horse, and——"

"Monsieur," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you shall drink of a liquor which comes from one single French word, and is none the worse for that—from the word *grape*; this cider gives me the heartburn. Allow me to inquire of your host if there is not a good bottle of Beaugency, or of the Ceran growth, at the back of the large bins in his cellar."

The host, being sent for, immediately attended.

"Monsieur," interrupted the poet, "take care, we shall not have time to drink the wine, unless we make great haste, for I must take advantage of the tide to secure the boat."

"What boat?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why the boat which sets out for Belle-Isle!"

"Ah—for Belle-Isle," said the musketeer, "that is good."

"Bah! you will have plenty of time, monsieur," replied the *hôte*, uncorking the bottle, "the boat will not leave this hour."

"But who will give me notice?" said the poet.

"Your fellow-traveler," replied the host.

"But I scarcely know him."

"When you hear him departing, it will be time for you to go."

"Is he going to Belle-Isle, likewise, then?"

"Yes."

"The traveler who has a lackey?" asked D'Artagnan.

"He is some gentleman, no doubt?"

"I know nothing of him."

"What!—know nothing of him?"

"No, all I know is, that he is drinking the same wine as you."

"*Peste!*—that is a great honor for us," said D'Artagnan, filling his companion's glass whilst the host went out.

"So," resumed the poet, returning to his dominant ideas, "you never saw any printing done?"

"Never."

"Well, then, take the letters thus, which compose the word, you see: A B; *ma foi!* here is an R, two E E, then a G." And he assembled the letters with a swiftness and skill which did not escape the eye of D'Artagnan.

"*Abrégé,*" said he, as he ended.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "here are plenty of letters got together; but how are they kept so?" And he poured out a second glass for the poet. M. Jupenet smiled like a man who has an answer for everything; then he pulled out—still from his pocket—a little metal ruler, composed of two parts, like a carpenter's rule, against which he put

together, and in a line, the characters, holding them under his left thumb.

"And what do you call that little metal ruler?" said D'Artagnan, "for, I suppose, all these things have names."

"This is called a composing-stick," said Jupenet; "it is by the aid of this stick that the lines are formed."

"Come, then, I was not mistaken in what I said; you have a press in your pocket," said D'Artagnan, laughing with an air of simplicity so stupid, that the poet, was completely his dupe."

"No," replied he; but I am too lazy to write, and when I have a verse in my head, I print it immediately. That is a labor spared."

"*Mordieux!*" thought D'Artagnan to himself, "this must be cleared up." And under a pretext, which did not embarrass the musketeer, who was fertile in expedients, he left the table, went downstairs, ran to the shed under which stood the poet's little cart, poked the point of his poniard into the stuff which enveloped one of the packages, which he found full of types, like those which the poet had in his pocket."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "I do not yet know whether M. Fouquet wishes to fortify Belle-Isle; but, at all events, here are some spiritual munitions for the castle." Then, enchanted with his rich discovery, he ran up-stairs again and resumed his place at the table.

D'Artagnan had learnt what he wished to know. He, however, remained, none the less, face to face with his partner, to the moment when they heard from the next room symptoms of a person's being about to go out. The printer was immediately on foot; he had given orders for his horse to be got ready. His carriage was waiting at the door. The second traveler got into his saddle, in the courtyard, with his lackey. D'Artagnan followed Jupenet to

the door; he embarked his cart and horse on board the boat. As to the opulent traveler, he did the same with his two horses and servant. But all the wit D'Artagnan employed in endeavoring to find out his name was lost—he could learn nothing. Only he took such notice of his countenance, that it was impressed upon his mind forever. D'Artagnan had a great inclination to embark with the two travelers, but an interest, more powerful than curiosity—that of success—repelled him from the shore, and brought him back again to the hostelry. He entered with a sigh, and went to bed directly in order to be ready early in the morning with fresh ideas and the sage counsel of sufficing sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

D'ARTAGNAN CONTINUES HIS INVESTIGATIONS.

At daybreak D'Artagnan saddled Furet, who had fared sumptuously all night, devouring the remainder of the oats and hay left by her companions. The musketeer sifted all he possibly could out of the host, whom he found cunning, mistrustful, and devoted, body and soul, to M. Fouquet. In order not to awaken the suspicions of this man, he carried on his fable of being a probable purchaser of some salt mines. To have embarked for Belle-Isle at Roche-Bernard, would have been to expose himself still further to comments which had, perhaps, been already made, and would be carried to the castle. Moreover, it was singular that this traveler and his lackey should have remained a mystery to D'Artagnan, in spite of all the questions addressed by him to the host, who appeared to know him perfectly well. The musketeer then made some inquiries concerning the salt-mines, and took the road to

the marshes, leaving the sea on his right, and penetrating into that vast and desolate plain which resembles a sea of mud, of which, here and there, a few crests of salt silver the undulations. Furet walked admirably, with his little nervous legs, along the foot-wide causeways which separate the salt-mines. D'Artagnan, aware of the consequences of a fall, which would result in a cold bath, allowed him to go as he liked, contenting himself with looking at, on the horizon, three rocks, that rose up like lance-blades from the bosom of the plain, destitute of verdure. Pirial, the bourgs of Batz and Le Croisic, exactly resembling each other, attracted and suspended his attention. If the traveler turned round, the better to make his observations, he saw on the other side an horizon of three other steeples, Guérande, Le Poulighen, and Saint-Joachim, which, in their circumference, represented a set of skittles, of which he and Furet were but the wandering ball. Pirial was the first little port on his right. He went thither, with the names of the principal salters on his lips. At the moment he reached the little port of Pirial, five large barges, laden with stone, were leaving it. It appeared strange to D'Artagnan, that stones should be leaving a country where none are found. He had recourse to all the amenity of M. Agnan to learn from the people of the port the cause of this singular arrangement. An old fisherman replied to M. Agnan, that the stones, very certainly did not come from Pirial or the marshes.

"Where do they come from, then?" asked the musketeer.

"Monsieur, they come from Nantes and Painbœuf."

"Where are they going, then?"

"Monsieur, to Belle-Isle."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan, in the same tone he had assumed to tell the printer that his character interested him; "are they building at Belle-Isle, then?"

"Why, yes, monsieur, M. Fouquet has the walls of the castle repaired every year."

"Is it in ruins, then?"

"It is old."

"Thank you."

"The fact is," said D'Artagnan to himself, "nothing is more natural; every proprietor has a right to repair his own property. It would be like telling me I was fortifying the Image-de-Notre-Dame, when I was simply obliged to make repairs. In good truth, I believe false reports have been made to his majesty, and he is very likely to be in the wrong."

"You must confess," continued he then, aloud, and addressing the fisherman—for his part of a suspicious man was imposed upon him by the object even of his mission—"you must confess, my dear monsieur, that these stones travel in a very curious fashion."

"How so?" said the fisherman.

"They come from Nantes or Painbœuf by the Loire, do they not?"

"With the tide."

"That is convenient,—I don't say it is not; but why do they not go straight from Saint-Nazaire to Belle-Isle?"

"Eh! because the *chalands* (barges) are fresh-water boats, and take the sea badly," replied the fisherman.

"That is not sufficient reason."

"Pardon me, monsieur, one may see that you have never been a sailor," added the fisherman, not without a sort of disdain.

"Explain that to me, if you please, my good man. It appears to me that to come from Painbœuf to Pirial, and go from Pirial to Belle-Isle, is as if we went from Roche-Bernard to Nantes, and from Nantes to Pirial."

"By water that would be the nearest way," replied the fisherman, imperturbably.

"But there is an elbow?"

The fisherman shook his head.

"The shortest road from one place to another is a straight line," continued D'Artagnan.

"You forget the tide, monsieur."

"Well! take the tide."

"And the wind."

"Well, and the wind."

"Without doubt; the current of the Loire carries barks almost as far as Croisic. If they want to lie by a little, or to refresh the crew, they come to Pirial along the coast; from Pirial they find another inverse current, which carries them to the Isle-Dumal, two leagues and a half."

"Granted."

"There the current of the Vilaine throws them upon another isle, the isle of Hoedic."

"I agree with that."

"Well, monsieur, from that isle to Belle-Isle the way is quite straight. The sea, broken both above and below, passes like a canal—like a mirror between the two isles; the *chalands* glide along upon it like ducks upon the Loire; that's how it is."

"It does not signify," said the obstinate M. Agnan; "it is a long way round."

"Ah! yes; but M. Fouquet will have it so," replied, as conclusive, the fisherman, taking off his woolen cap at the enunciation of that respected name.

A look from D'Artagnan, a look as keen and piercing as a sword-blade, found nothing in the heart of the old man but simple confidence—on his features, nothing but satisfaction and indifference. He said, "M. Fouquet will have it so," as he would have said, "God has willed it."

D'Artagnan had already advanced too far in this direction; besides, the *chalands* being gone, there remained nothing at Pirial but a single bark—that of the old man,

and it did not look fit for sea without great preparation. D'Artagnan therefore patted Furet, who, as a new proof of his charming character, resumed his march with his feet in the salt mines, and his nose to the dry wind, which bends the furze and the broom of this country. They reached Croisic about five o'clock.

If D'Artagnan had been a poet, it was a beautiful spectacle: the immense strand of a league or more, the sea covers at high tide, and which, at the reflux, appears gray and desolate, strewed with polypi and seaweed, with pebbles sparse and white, like bones in some vast old cemetery. But the soldier, the politician, and the ambitious man, had no longer the sweet consolation of looking towards heaven, to read there a hope or a warning. A red sky signifies nothing to such people but wind and disturbance. White and fleecy clouds upon the azure only say that the sea will be smooth and peaceful. D'Artagnan found the sky blue, the breeze embalmed with saline perfumes, and he said: "I will embark with the first tide, if it be but in a nutshell."

At Croisic as at Pirial, he had remarked enormous heaps of stone lying along the shore. These gigantic walls, diminished every tide by the barges for Belle-Isle, were, in the eyes of the musketeer, the consequence and the proof of what he had well divined at Pirial. Was it a wall that M. Fouquet was constructing? was it a fortification that he was erecting? To ascertain that, he must make fuller observations. D'Artagnan put Furet into a stable; supped, went to bed, and on the morrow took a walk upon the port or rather upon the shingle. De Croisic has a port of fifty feet; it has a look-out which resembles an enormous *brioche* (a kind of cake) elevated on a dish. The flat strand is the dish. Hundreds of barrowsful of earth amalgamated with pebbles, and rounded into cones, with sinuous passages between, are look-outs and *briches* at the same time. It

is so now, and it was so two hundred years ago, only the *brioche* was not so large, and probably there were to be seen no trellises of lath around the *brioche*, which constitute an ornament, planted like *gardes-fous* along the passages that wind towards the little terrace. Upon the shingle lounged three or four fishermen talking about sardines and shrimps. D'Artagnan, with his eyes animated by rough gayety, and a smile upon his lips, approached these fishermen.

"Any fishing going on to day?" said he.

"Yes, monsieur," replied one of them, "we are only waiting for the tide."

"Where do you fish, my friends?"

"Upon the coasts, monsieur."

"Which are the best coasts?"

"Ah, that is all according. The tour of the isles, for example."

"Yes, but they are a long way off, those isles, are they not?"

"Not very; four leagues."

"Four leagues! That is a voyage."

The fishermen laughed in M. Agnan's face.

"Hear me, then," said the latter, with an air of simple stupidity; "four leagues off you lose sight of land, do you not?"

"Why, not always."

"Ah, it is a long way—too long, or else I would have asked you to take me aboard, and to show me what I have never seen."

"What is that?"

"A live sea-fish."

"Monsieur comes from the province?" said a fisherman.

"Yes, I come from Paris."

The Breton shrugged his shoulders; then:

"Have you ever seen M. Fouquet in Paris?" asked he.

"Often," replied D'Artagnan.

"Often!" repeated the fishermen, closing their circle round the Parisian. "Do you know him?"

"A little; he is the intimate friend of my master."

"Ah!" said the fisherman, in astonishment.

"And," said D'Artagnan, "I have seen all his châteaux of Saint Mandé, of Vaux, and his hotel in Paris."

"Is that a fine place?"

"Superb."

"It is not so fine a place as Belle-Isle," said the fisherman.

"Bah!" cried M. d'Artagnan, breaking into a laugh so loud that he angered all his auditors.

"It is very plain you have never seen Belle-Isle," said the most curious of the fishermen. "Do you know that there are six leagues of it; and that there are such trees on it as cannot be equalled even at Nantes-sur-le-Fossé?"

"Trees in the sea!" cried D'Artagnan; "well, I should like to see them."

"That can be easily done; we are fishing at the Isle de Hoedic—come with us. From that place you will see, as a Paradise, the black trees of Belle-Isle against the sky; you will see the white line of the castle, which cuts the horizon of the sea like a blade."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "that must be very beautiful. But do you know there are a hundred belfries at M. Fouquet's château of Vaux?"

The Breton raised his head in profound admiration, but he was not convinced. "A hundred belfries! Ah, that may be; but Belle-Isle is finer than that. Should you like to see Belle-Isle?"

"Is that possible?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with permission of the governor."

"But I do not know the governor."

"As you know M. Fouquet, you can tell your name."

"Oh, my friends, I am not a gentleman."

"Everybody enters Belle-Isle," continued the fisherman in his strong, pure language, "provided he means no harm to Belle-Isle or its master."

A slight shudder crept over the body of the musketeer. "That is true," thought he. Then, recovering himself, "If I were sure," said he, "not to be sea-sick."

"What upon *her*?" said the fisherman, pointing with pride to his pretty round-bottomed bark."

"Well, you almost persuade me," cried M. Agnan; "I will go and see Belle-Isle, but they will not admit me."

"We shall enter, safe enough."

"You! What for?"

"Why, *dame!* to sell fish to the corsairs."

"Ha! Corsairs—what do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that M. Fouquet is having two corsairs built to chase the Dutch and the English, and we sell our fish to the crews of those little vessels."

"Come, come!" said D'Artagnan to himself—"better and better. A printing-press, bastions, and corsairs! Well, M. Fouquet is not an enemy to be despised, as I presumed to fancy. He is worth the trouble of travelling to see him nearer."

"We set out at half-past five," said the fisherman gravely.

"I am quite ready, and I will not leave you now." So D'Artagnan saw the fishermen haul their barks to meet the tide with a windlass. The sea rose; M. Agnan allowed himself to be hoisted on board, not without sporting a little fear and awkwardness, to the amusement of the young beach-urchins who watched him with their large intelligent eyes. He laid himself down upon a folded sail, not interfering with anything whilst the bark prepared for sea; and, with its large, square sail, it

was fairly out within two hours. The fishermen, who prosecuted their occupation as they proceeded, did not perceive that their passenger had not become pale, neither groaned nor suffered; that in spite of that horrible tossing and rolling of the bark, to which no hand imparted direction, the novice passenger had preserved his presence of mind and his appetite. They fished, and their fishing was sufficiently fortunate. To lines bated with prawn, soles came, with numerous gambols, to bite. Two nets had already been broken by the immense weight of congers and haddocks; three sea-eels plowed the hold with their slimy folds and their dying contortions. D'Artagnan brought them good luck; they told him so. The soldier found the occupation so pleasant, that he put his hand to the work—that is to say, to the lines—and uttered roars of joy, and *mordious* enough to have astonished his musketeers themselves every time that a shock given to his line by the captured fish required the play of the muscles of his arm, and the employment of his best dexterity. The party of pleasure had made him forget his diplomatic mission. He was struggling with a very large conger, and holding fast with one hand to the side of the vessel, in order to seize with the other the gaping jowl of his antagonist, when the master said to him. “Take care they don’t see you from Belle-Isle!”

These words produced the same effect upon D'Artagnan as the hissing of the first bullet on a day of battle; he let go of both line and conger, which, dragging each other, returned again to the water. D'Artagnan perceived, within half a league at most, the blue and marked profile of the rocks of Belle-Isle, dominated by the majestic whiteness of the castle. In the distance, the land with its forests and verdant plains; cattle on the grass. This was what first attracted the attention of the musketeer. The sun darted its rays of gold upon the sea, raising a

shining mist round this enchanted isle. Little could be seen of it, owing to this dazzling light, but the salient points; every shadow was strongly marked, and cut with bands of darkness the luminous fields and walls. "Eh! eh!" said D'Artagnan, at the aspect of those masses of black rocks, "these are fortifications which do not stand in need of any engineer to render a landing difficult. How the devil can a landing be effected on that isle which God has defended so completely?"

"This way," replied the patron of the bark, changing the sail, and impressing upon the rudder a twist which turned the boat in the direction of a pretty little port, quite coquettish, round, and newly battlemented.

"What the devil do I see yonder?" said D'Artagnan.

"You see Leomaria," replied the fisherman.

"Well, but there?"

"That is Bragos."

"And further on?"

"Sanger, and then the palace."

"*Mordioux!* It is a world. Ah! there are some soldiers."

"There are seventeen hundred men in Belle-Isle, monsieur," replied the fisherman, proudly. "Do you know that the least garrison is of twenty companies of infantry?"

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, stamping with his foot. "His majesty was right enough."

They landed.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH THE READER, NO DOUBT, WILL BE AS ASTONISHED AS D'ARTAGNAN WAS TO MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THERE is always something in a landing, if it be only from the smallest sea-boat—a trouble and a confusion which do not leave the mind the liberty of which it stands in need in order to study at the first glance the new locality presented to it. The movable bridges, the agitated sailors, the noise of the water on the pebbles, the cries and importunities of those who wait upon the shores, are multiplied details of that sensation which is summed up in one single result—hesitation. It was not, then, till after standing several minutes on the shore that D'Artagnan saw upon the port, but more particularly in the interior of the isle, an immense number of workmen in motion. At his feet D'Artagnan recognized the five chalands laden with rough stone he had seen leave the port of Pirial. The smaller stones were transported to the shore by means of a chain formed by twenty-five or thirty peasants. The large stones were loaded on trollies which conveyed them in the same direction as the others, that is to say towards the works, of which D'Artagnan could as yet appreciate neither the strength nor the extent. Everywhere was to be seen an activity equal to that which Telemachus observed on his landing at Salentum. D'Artagnan felt a strong inclination to penetrate into the interior; but he could not, under the penalty of exciting mistrust, exhibit too much curiosity. He advanced then little by little, scarcely going beyond the line formed

by the fishermen on the beach, observing everything, saying nothing, and meeting all suspicion that might have been excited with a half-silly question or a polite bow. And yet, whilst his companions carried on their trade, giving or selling their fish to the workmen or the inhabitants of the city, D'Artagnan had gained ground by degrees, and, reassured by the little attention paid to him, he began to cast an intelligent and confident look upon the men and things that appeared before his eyes. And his very first glance fell on certain movements of earth about which the eye of a soldier could not be mistaken. At the two extremities of the port, in order that their fires should converge upon the great axis of the ellipsis formed by the basin, in the first place, two batteries had been raised, evidently destined to receive flank pieces, for D'Artagnan saw the workmen finishing the platform and making ready the demi-circumference in wood upon which the wheels of the pieces might turn to embrace every direction over the epaulement. By the side of each of these batteries other workmen were strengthening gabions filled with earth, the lining of another battery. The latter had embrasures, and the overseer of the works called successively men who, with cords, tied the *saucissons* and cut the lozenges and right angles of turfs destined to retain the matting of the embrasures. By the activity displayed in these works, already so far advanced, they might be considered as finished: they were not yet furnished with their cannons, but the platforms had their *gîtes* and their *madriers* all prepared; the earth, beaten carefully, was consolidated; and supposing the artillery to be on the island, in less than two or three days the port might be completely armed. That which astonished D'Artagnan, when he turned his eyes from the coast batteries to the fortifications of the city, was to see that Belle-Isle was defended by an entirely new system, of which he had

often heard the Comte de la Fère speak as a wonderful advance, but of which he had as yet never seen the application. These fortifications belonged neither to the Dutch method of Marollais, nor to the French method of the Chevalier Antoine de Ville, but to the system of Manesson Mallet, a skillful engineer, who about six or eight years previously had quitted the service of Portugal to enter that of France. The works had this peculiarity, that instead of raising above the earth, as did the ancient ramparts destined to defend a city from escalades, they on the contrary, sank into it; and what created the height of the walls was the depth of the ditches. It did not take long to make D'Artagnan perceive the superiority of such a system, which gives no advantage to cannon. Besides, as the *fossés* were lower than, or on a level with, the sea, these *fossés* could be instantly inundated by means of subterranean sluices. Otherwise, the works were almost complete, and a group of workmen, receiving orders from a man who appeared to be conductor of the works, were occupied in placing the last stones. A bridge of planks, thrown over the *fossés* for the greater convenience of the maneuvers connected with the barrows, joined the interior to the exterior. With an air of simple curiosity, D'Artagnan asked if he might be permitted to cross the bridge, and he was told that no order prevented it. Consequently he crossed the bridge, and advanced towards the group.

This group was superintended by the man whom D'Artagnan had already remarked, and who appeared to be the engineer-in-chief. A plan was lying open before him upon a large stone forming a table, and at some paces from him a crane was in action. This engineer, who by his evident importance first attracted the attention of D'Artagnan, wore a *justaucorps*, which, from its sumptuousness, was scarcely in harmony with the work

he was employed in, that rather necessitated the costume of a master-mason than of a noble. He was a man of immense stature and great square shoulders, and wore a hat covered with feathers. He gesticulated in the most majestic manner, and appeared, for D'Artagnan only saw his back, to be scolding the workmen for their idleness and want of strength.

D'Artagnan continued to draw nearer. At that moment the man with the feathers ceased to gesticulate, and, with his hands placed upon his knees, was following, half-bent, the effort of six workmen to raise a block of hewn stone to the top of a piece of timber destined to support that stone, so that the cord of the crane might be passed under it. The six men, all on one side of the stone, united their efforts to raise it to eight or ten inches from the ground, sweating and blowing, whilst a seventh got ready against there should be daylight enough beneath it to slide in the roller that was to support it. But the stone had already twice escaped from their hands before gaining a sufficient height for the roller to be introduced. There can be no doubt that every time the stone escaped them, they bounded quickly backwards, to keep their feet from being crushed by the refalling stone. Every time, the stone, abandoned by them, sunk deeper into the damp earth, which rendered the operation more and more difficult. A third effort was followed by no better success, but with progressive discouragement. And yet, when the six men were bent towards the stone, the man with the feathers had himself, with a powerful voice, given the word of command, "*Ferme!*" which regulates maneuvers of strength. Then he drew himself up.

"Oh! oh!" said he, "what is all this about? Have I to do with men of straw? *Corne de bœuf!* stand on one side, and you shall see how this is to be done."

"*Peste!*" said D'Artagnan, "will he pretend to raise

that rock? that would be a sight worth looking at."

The workmen, as commanded by the engineer, drew back with their ears down, and shaking their heads, with the exception of the one who held the plank, who prepared to perform the office. The man with the feathers went up to the stone, stooped, slipped his hands under the face lying upon the ground, stiffened his Herculean muscles, and, without a strain, with a slow motion, like that of a machine, he lifted the end of the rock a foot from the ground. The workman who held the plank profited by the space thus given him, and slipped the roller under the stone.

"That's the way," said the giant, not letting the rock fall again, but placing it upon its support.

"*Mordious!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I know but one man capable of such a feat of strength."

"*Hein!*" cried the colossus, turning round.

"Porthos!" murmured D'Artagnan, seized with stupor, "Porthos at Belle-Isle!"

On his part, the man with the feathers fixed his eyes upon the disguised lieutenant, and, in spite of his metamorphosis, recognized him. "D'Artagnan!" cried he; and the color mounted to his face. "Hush!" said he to D'Artagnan.

"Hush!" in his turn, said the musketeer. In fact, if Porthos had just been discovered by D'Artagnan, D'Artagnan had just been discovered by Porthos. The interest of the particular secret of each struck them both at the same instant. Nevertheless, the first movement of the two men was to throw their arms round each other. What they wished to conceal from the bystanders, was not their friendship, but their names. But, after the embrace, came reflection.

"What the devil brings Porthos to Belle-Isle, lifting stones?" said D'Artagnan; only D'Artagnan uttered

that question in a low voice. Less strong in diplomacy than his friend, Porthos thought aloud.

"How the devil did you come to Belle-Isle?" asked he of D'Artagnan; "and what do you want to do here?" It was necessary to reply without hesitation. To hesitate in his answer to Porthos would have been a check, for which the self-love of D'Artagnan would never have consoled itself.

"*Pardieu!* my friend, I am at Belle-Isle because *you* are."

"Ah, bah!" said Porthos, visibly stupefied with the argument, and seeking to account for it to himself, with the felicity of deduction we know to be peculiar to him.

"Without doubt," continued D'Artagnan, unwilling to give his friend time to recollect himself, "I have been to see you at Pierrefonds."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"And you did not find me there?"

"No, but I found Mouston."

"Is he well?"

"*Peste!*"

"Well, but Mouston did not tell you I was here."

"Why should he *not*? Have I, perchance, deserved to lose his confidence?"

"No; but he did not know it."

"Well; that is a reason at least that does not offend my self-love."

"Then, how did you manage to find me?"

"My dear friend, a great noble, like you, always leaves traces behind him on his passage; and I should think but poorly of myself, if I were not sharp enough to follow the traces of my friends." This explanation, flattering as it was, did not entirely satisfy Porthos.

"But I left no traces behind me, for I came here disguised," said Porthos.

"Ah! You came disguised, did you?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"And how?"

"As a miller."

"And do you think a great noble, like you, Porthos, can affect common manners so as to deceive people?"

"Well, I swear to you, my friend, that I played my part so well that *everybody* was deceived."

"Indeed! so well, that I have not discovered and joined you?"

"Yes; but *how* did you discover and join me?"

"Stop a bit. I was going to tell you how. Do you imagine Mouston——?"

"Ah! it was that fellow, Mouston," said Porthos, gathering up those two triumphant arches which served him for eyebrows.

"But stop, I tell you—it was no fault of Mouston's, because he was ignorant of where you were."

"I know he was; and that is why I am in such haste to understand——"

"Oh! how impatient you are, Porthos."

"When I do not comprehend, I am terrible."

"Well, you will understand. Aramis wrote to you at Pierrefonds, did he not?"

"Yes."

"And he told you to come before the equinox."

"That is true."

"Well! that is it," said D'Artagnan, hoping that this reason would mystify Porthos. Porthos appeared to give himself up to a violent mental labor.

"Yes, yes," said he, "I understand. As Aramis told me to come before the equinox, you have understood that that was to join him. You then inquired where Aramis was, saying to yourself, 'Where Aramis is, there Porthos

will be.' You have learnt that Aramis was in Bretagne, and you said to yourself, 'Porthos is in Bretagne.'"

"Exactly. In good truth, Porthos, I cannot tell why you have not turned conjurer. So you understand that, arriving at Roche-Bernard, I heard of the splendid fortifications going on at Belle-Isle. The account raised my curiosity, I embarked in a fishing-boat, without dreaming that you were here: I came, and I saw a monstrous fine fellow lifting a stone Ajax could not have stirred. I cried out, 'Nobody but the Baron de Bracieux could have performed such a feat of strength.' You heard me, you turned round, you recognized me, we embraced; and, *ma foi*! if you like, my dear friend, we will embrace again."

"Ah! now all is explained," said Porthos; and he embraced D'Artagnan with so much friendship as to deprive the musketeer of his breath for five minutes.

"Why, you are stronger than ever," said D'Artagnan, "and still, happily, in your *arms*." Porthos saluted D'Artagnan with a gracious smile. During the five minutes D'Artagnan was recovering his breath, he reflected that he had a very difficult part to play. It was necessary that he always should question and never reply. By the time his respiration returned, he had fixed his plans for the campaign.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN THE IDEAS OF D'ARTAGNAN, AT FIRST STRANGELY CLOUDED, BEGIN TO CLEAR UP A LITTLE.

D'ARTAGNAN immediately took the offensive. "Now that I have told you all, dear friend, or rather now you have guessed all, tell me what you are doing here, covered with dust and mud?"

Porthos wiped his brow, and looked around him with pride. "Why, it appears," said he, "that you may see what I am doing here."

"No doubt, no doubt, you lift great stones."

"Oh! to show these idle fellows what a *man* is," said Porthos, with contempt. "But you understand——"

"Yes, that it is not your place to lift stones, although there are many whose place it is, who cannot lift them as you do. It was that which made me ask you, just now. What are you doing here, baron?"

"I am studying topography, chevalier."

"You are studying topography?"

"Yes; but you—what are you doing in that common dress?"

D'Artagnan perceived he had committed a fault in giving expression to his astonishment. Porthos had taken advantage of it, to retort with a question. "Why," said he, "you know I am a bourgeois, in fact; my dress, then, has nothing astonishing in it, since it conforms with my condition."

"Nonsense! you are a musketeer."

"You are wrong, my friend; I have given in my resignation."

"Bah!"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes."

"And have you abandoned the service?"

"I have quitted it."

"You have abandoned the king?"

"Quite."

Porthos raised his arms towards heaven, like a man who has heard extraordinary news. "Well, that *does* confound me," said he.

"It is nevertheless true."

"And what led you to form such a resolution?"

"The king displeased me. Mazarin had disgusted me

for a long time, as you know; so I threw my cassock to the nettles."

"But Mazarin is dead."

"I know that well enough, *parbleu!* Only, at the period of his death, my resignation had been given in and accepted two months. Then, feeling myself free, I set off for Pierrefonds, to see my friend Porthos. I had heard talk of the happy division you had made of your time, and I wished, for a fortnight, to divide mine after your fashion."

"My friend, you know that it is not for a fortnight my house is open to you; it is for a year—for ten years—for life."

"Thank you, Porthos."

"Ah! but perhaps you want money—do you?" said Porthos, making something like fifty louis chink in his pocket. "In that case, you know——"

"No, thank you; I am not in want of anything. I placed my savings with Planchet, who pays me the interest of them."

"Your savings?"

"Yes, to be sure," said D'Artagnan: "why should I not put by my savings, as well as another, Porthos?"

"Oh, there is no reason why; on the contrary, I always suspected you—that is to say, Aramis always suspected you to have savings. For my own part, d'ye see, I take no concern about the management of my household; but I presume the savings of a musketeer must be small."

"No doubt, relative to yourself, Porthos, who are a millionaire; but you shall judge. I had laid by twenty-five thousand livres."

"That's pretty well," said Porthos, with an affable air.

"And," continued D'Artagnan, "on the twenty-eighth of last month I added to it two hundred thousand livres more."

Porthos opened his large eyes, which eloquently demanded of the musketeer, Where the devil did you steal such a sum as that, my dear friend? "Two hundred thousand livres!" cried he, at length.

"Yes; which, with the twenty-five I had, and twenty thousand I have about me, complete the sum of two hundred and forty-five thousand livres."

"But tell me, whence comes this fortune?"

"I will tell you all about it presently, dear friend; but as you have, in the first place, many things to tell me yourself, let us have my recital in its proper order."

"Bravo!" said Porthos; "then we are both rich. But what can I have to relate to you?"

"You have to relate to me how Aramis came to be named——"

"Ah! bishop of Vannes."

"That's it," said D'Artagnan, "bishop of Vannes. Dear Aramis! do you know how he succeeded so well?"

"Yes, yes; without reckoning that he does not mean to stop there."

"What! do you mean he will not be contented with violet stockings, and that he wants a red hat?"

"Hush! that is *promised* him."

"Bah! by the king?"

"By somebody more powerful than the king."

"Ah! the devil! Porthos: what incredible things you tell me, my friend!"

"Why incredible? Is there not *always* somebody in France more powerful than the king?"

"Oh, yes; in the time of King Louis XIII. it was Cardinal Richelieu; in the time of the Regency it was Cardinal Mazarin. In the time of Louis XIV. it is M——"

"Go on."

"It is M. Fouquet."

"Jove! you have hit it the first time."

"So, then, I suppose it is M. Fouquet who has promised Aramis the red-hat?"

Porthos assumed an air of reserve. "Dear friend," said he, "God preserve me from meddling with the affairs of others, above all from revealing secrets it may be to their interest to keep. When you see Aramis, he will tell you all he thinks he ought to tell you."

"You are right, Porthos; and you are quite a padlock for safety. But, to revert to yourself?"

"Yes," said Porthos.

"You said just now you came hither to study topography?"

"I did so."

"*Tudieu!* my friend, what fine things you will do!"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, these fortifications are admirable."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Decidedly it is. In truth, to anything but a regular siege, Belle-Isle is absolutely impregnable."

Porthos rubbed his hands. "That is my opinion," said he.

"But who the devil has fortified this paltry little place in this manner?"

Porthos drew himself up proudly: "Did not I tell you who?"

"No."

"Do you not suspect?"

"No; all I can say is that he is a man who has studied all the systems, and who appears to me to have stopped at the best."

"Hush!" said Porthos; "consider my modesty, my dear D'Artagnan."

"In truth," replied the musketeer, "can it be you—who—oh!"

"Pray—my dear friend——"

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"You who have imagined, traced, and combined between these bastions, these redans, these curtains, these half-moons; and are preparing that covered way?"

"I beg you——"

"You who have built that lunette with its retiring angles and its salient angles."

"My friend——"

"You who have given that inclination to the openings, of your embrasures, by means of which you so effectively protect the men who serve the guns!"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* yes."

"Oh! Porthos, Porthos! I must bow down before you—I must admire you! But you have always concealed from us this superb, this incomparable genius. I hope, my dear friend, you will show me all this in detail?"

"Nothing more easy. Here lies my original sketch, my plan."

"Show it me." Porthos led D'Artagnan towards the stone that served him for a table, and upon which the plan was spread. At the foot of the plan was written, in the formidable writing of Porthos, writing of which we have already had occasion to speak:—

"Instead of making use of the square or rectangle, as has been done to this time, you will suppose your place inclosed in a regular hexagon, this polygon having the advantage of offering more angles than the quadrilateral one. Every side of your hexagon, of which you will determine the length in proportion to the dimensions taken upon the place, will be divided into two parts, and upon the middle point you will elevate a perpendicular towards the center of the polygon, which will equal in length the sixth part of the side. By the extremities of each side of the polygon, you will trace two diagonals, which will cut the perpendicular, These will form the precise lines of your defense."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, stopping at this point of the demonstration; "Why, this is a complete system, Porthos."

"Entirely," said Porthos. "Continue."

"No; I have read enough of it; but, since it is you, my dear Porthos, who direct the works, what need have you of setting down your system so formally in writing?"

"Oh! my dear friend, death!"

"How! death?"

"Why, we are all mortal, are we not?"

"That is true," said D'Artagnan; "you have a reply for everything, my friend." And he replaced the plan upon the stone.

But however short the time he had the plan in his hands, D'Artagnan had been able to distinguish, under the enormous writing of Porthos, a much more delicate hand, which reminded him of certain letters to Marie Michon, with which he had been acquainted in his youth. Only the India-rubber had passed and repassed so often over this writing that it might have escaped a less practiced eye than that of our musketeer.

"Bravo! my friend, bravo!" said D'Artagnan.

"And now you know all that you want to know, do you not?" said Porthos, wheeling about.

"*Mordieu!* yes, only do me one last favor, dear friend?"

"Speak, I am master here."

"Do me the pleasure to tell me the name of that gentleman who is walking yonder."

"Where, there?"

"Behind the soldiers."

"Followed by a lackey?"

"Exactly."

"In company with a mean sort of fellow, dressed in black?"

"Yes, I mean him."

"That is M. Gétard."

"And who is Gétard, my friend?"

"He is the architect of the house."

"Of what house?"

"Of M. Fouquet's house."

"Ah! ah!" cried D'Artagnan, "you are of the household of M. Fouquet, then, Porthos?"

"I! what do you mean by that?" said the topographer, blushing to the top of his ears.

"Why, you say the house, when speaking of Belle-Isle, as if you were speaking of the château of Pierrefonds."

Porthos bit his lips. "Belle-Isle, my friend," said he, "belongs to M. Fouquet, does it not?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"As Pierrefonds belongs to me?"

"I told you I believed so; there are no two words to *that*."

"Did you ever see a man there who is accustomed to walk about with a ruler in his hand?"

"No; but I might have seen him there, if he really walked there."

"Well, that gentleman is M. Boulingrin."

"Who is M. Boulingrin?"

"Now we are coming to it. If, when this gentleman is walking with a ruler in his hand, any one should ask me, —'Who is M. Boulingrin?' I should reply: 'He is the architect of the house.' Well! M. Gétard is the Boulingrin of M. Fouquet. But he has nothing to do with the fortifications, which are my department alone; do you understand? mine, absolutely mine."

"Ah! Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, letting his arms fall as a conquered man gives up his sword; "ah! my friend, you are not only a herculean topographer, you are, still further, a dialectician of the first water."

"Is it not powerfully reasoned?" said Porthos: and he puffed and blew like the conger which D'Artagnan had let slip from his hand.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "that shabby-looking man, who accompanies M. Gétard, is he also of the household of M. Fouquet?"

"Oh! yes," said Porthos, with contempt; "it is one M. Jupenet, or Juponet, a sort of poet."

"Who is to come to establish himself here?"

"I believe so."

"I thought M. Fouquet had poets enough, yonder—Scudery, Loret, Pellisson, La Fontaine? If I must tell you the truth, Porthos, that poet disgraces you."

"Eh!—my friend; but what saves us is that he is not here as a poet."

"As what, then, is he?"

"As printer. And you make me remember, I have a word to say to the *cuistre*."

"Say it, then."

Porthos made a sign to Jupenet, who perfectly recollected D'Artagnan, and did not care to come nearer; which naturally produced another sign from Porthos. This was so imperative, he was obliged to obey. As he approached. "Come hither!" said Porthos. "You only landed yesterday, and you have begun your tricks already."

"How so, monsieur le baron?" asked Jupenet, trembling.

"Your press was groaning all night, monsieur," said Porthos, "and you prevented my sleeping, *corne de bœuf*!"

"Monsieur——" objected Jupenet, timidly.

"You have nothing yet to print: therefore you have no occasion to set your press going. What did you print last night?"

"Monsieur, a light poem of my own composition"

"Light! no, no, monsieur; the press groaned pitifully beneath it. Let it not happen again. Do you understand?"

"Yes; monsieur."

"You promise me?"

"I do, monsieur!"

"Very well; this time I pardon you. Adieu!"

"Well, now we have combed that fellow's head, let us breakfast."

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "let us breakfast."

"Only," said Porthos, "I beg you to observe my friend, that we have only two hours for our repast."

"What would you have? We will try to make two hours suffice. But why have you only two hours?"

"Because it is high tide at one o'clock, and, with the tide, I am going to Vannes. But, as I shall return to-morrow, my dear friend, you can stay here; you shall be master; I have a good cook and a good cellar."

"No," interrupted D'Artagnan, "better than that."

"What?"

"You are going to Vannes, you say?"

"To a certainty."

"To see Aramis?"

"Yes."

"Well! I came from Paris on purpose to see Aramis."

"That's true."

"I will go with you then."

"Do; that's the thing."

"Only, I ought to have seen Aramis first, and you after. But man proposes, and God disposes. I have begun with you, and will finish with Aramis."

"Very well!"

"And in how many hours can you go from here to Vannes?"

"Oh! *pardieu!* in six hours. Three hours by sea to

Sarzeau, three hours by road from Sarzeau to Vannes."

"How convenient that is! Being so near to the bishopric; do you often go to Vannes?"

"Yes; once a week. But, stop till I get my plan."

Porthos picked up his plan, folded it carefully, and engulfed it in his large pocket.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan aside; "I think I now know the real engineer who is fortifying Belle-Isle."

Two hours after, at high tide, Porthos and D'Artagnan set out for Sarzeau.

CHAPTER XV.

A PROCESSION AT VANNES.

THE passage from Belle-Isle to Sarzeau was made rapidly enough, thanks to one of those little corsairs of which D'Artagnan had been told during his voyage, and which, shaped for fast sailing and destined for the chase, were sheltered at that time in the roadstead of Loc-Maria, where one of them, with a quarter of its war-crew, performed duty between Belle-Isle and the continent. D'Artagnan had an opportunity of convincing himself that Porthos, though engineer and topographer, was not deeply versed in affairs of state. His perfect ignorance, with any other, might have passed for well-informed dissimulation. But D'Artagnan knew too well all the folds and refolds of his Porthos, not to find a secret if there were one there; like those regular, minute old bachelors, who know how to find, with their eyes shut, each book on the shelves of their library and each piece of linen in their wardrobe. So if he had found nothing, our cunning D'Artagnan, in rolling and unrolling his Porthos, it was because, in truth, there was nothing to be found.

"Be it so," said D'Artagnan; "I shall get to know more at Vannes in half an hour, than Porthos has discovered at Belle-Isle in two months. Only, in order that I may know something, it is important that Porthos should not make use of the only stratagem I leave at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my arrival." All the care of the musketeer was then, for the moment, confined to the watching of Porthos. And let us hasten to say, Porthos did not deserve all this mistrust. Porthos thought of no evil. Perhaps, on first seeing him, D'Artagnan had inspired him with a little suspicion; but almost immediately D'Artagnan had reconquered in that good and brave heart the place he had always occupied, and not the least cloud darkened the large eye of Porthos, fixed from time to time with tenderness on his friend.

On landing, Porthos inquired if his horses were waiting and soon perceived them at the crossing of the road that winds round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that little city, leads towards Vannes. These horses were two in number, one for M. de Vallon, and one for his equerry; for Porthos had an equerry since Mouston was only able to use a carriage as a means of locomotion. D'Artagnan expected that Porthos would propose to send forward his equerry upon one horse to bring back another, and he—D'Artagnan—had made up his mind to oppose this proposition. But nothing D'Artagnan had expected happened. Porthos simply told the equerry to dismount and await his return at Sarzeau, whilst D'Artagnan would ride his horse; which was arranged.

"Eh! but you are quite a man of precaution, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan to his friend, when he found himself in the saddle, upon the equerry's horse.

"Yes; but this is a kindness on the part of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my disposal."

"Good horses for bishop's horses, *mordious!*" said D'Artagnan. "It is true, Aramis is a bishop of a peculiar kind."

"He is a holy man!" replied Porthos, in a tone almost nasal, and with his eyes raised towards heaven.

"Then he is much changed," said D'Artagnan; "you and I have known him passably profane."

"Grace has touched him," said Porthos.

"Bravo," said D'Artagnan, "that redoubles my desire to see my dear old friend." And he spurred his horse, which sprang off into a more rapid pace.

"*Peste!*" said Porthos, "if we go on at this rate, we shall only take one hour instead of two."

"To go how far, do you say, Porthos?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"That will be a good pace."

"I could have embarked you on the canal, but the devil take rowers and boat-horses! The first are like tortoises; the second like snails; and when a man is able to put a good horse between his knees, that horse is better than rowers or any other means."

"You are right; you above all, Porthos, who always look magnificent on horseback."

"Rather heavy, my friend; I was weighed the other day."

"And what do you weigh?"

"Three hundred-weight!" said Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

"So that you must perceive, I am forced to choose horses whose loins are straight and wide, otherwise I break them down in two hours."

"Yes, giant's horses you must have, must you not?"

"You are very polite, my friend," replied the engineer, with affectionate majesty.

"As a case in point," replied D'Artagnan, "your horse seems to sweat already."

"*Dame!* It is hot! Ah, ah! do you see Vannes now?"

"Yes, perfectly. It is a handsome city, apparently."

"Charming, according to Aramis, at least; but I think it black; but black seems to be considered handsome by artists: I am sorry for it."

"Why so, Porthos?"

"Because I have lately had my château of Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "and white is more cheerful."

"Yes, but it is less august, as Aramis tells me. Fortunately there are dealers in black as well as white. I will have Pierrefonds replastered in black; that's all there is about it. If gray is handsome, you understand, my friend, black must be superb."

"*Dame!*" said D'Artagnan, "that appears logical."

"Were you never at Vannes, D'Artagnan?"

"Never."

"Then you know nothing of the city?"

"Nothing."

"Well, look!" said Porthos, raising himself in his stirrups, which made the four quarters of his horse bend sadly,—“do you see that corner, in the sun, yonder?"

"Yes, I see it plainly."

"Well that is the cathedral."

"Which is called?"

"Saint-Pierre. Now look again—in the faubourg on the left, do you see another cross?"

"Perfectly well."

"That is Saint-Paterne, the parish preferred by Aramis."

"Indeed!"

"Without doubt. Saint-Paterne, you see, passes for having been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis pretends he was not. But he is so learned that that may be only a paro—a para——"

"A paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely; thank you! my tongue trips, I am so hot."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "continue your interesting description, I beg. What is that large white building with many windows?"

"Oh! that is the college of the Jesuits. *Pardieu!* you have an apt hand. Do you see, close to the college, a large house with steeples, turrets, built in a handsome Gothic style, as that fool, M. Gétard, says?"

"Yes, that is plainly to be seen. Well?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides."

"What! does he not reside at the episcopal palace?"

"No; that is in ruins. The palace likewise is in the city, and Aramis prefers the faubourgs. That is why, as I told you, he is partial to Saint-Paterne; Saint-Paterne is in the faubourg. Besides, there are in this faubourg a mall, a tennis-court, and a house of Dominicans. Look, that where the handsome steeple rises to the heavens."

"Well?"

"Next, you see the faubourg is like a separate city, it has its walls, its towers, its ditches; the quay is upon it likewise, and the boats land at the quay. If our little corsair did not draw eight feet of water, we could have come full sail up to Aramis's windows."

"Porthos, Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, "you are a well of knowledge, a spring of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me, you confound me."

"Here we are," said Porthos, turning the conversation with his usual modesty.

"And high time we were," thought D'Artagnan, "for Aramis's horse is melting away like a steed of ice."

They entered almost at the same instant the faubourg; but scarcely had they gone a hundred paces when they were surprised to find the streets strewed with leaves and flowers. Against the old walls of Vannes, hung the oldest and the strangest tapestries of France. From over balconies fell long white sheets stuck all over with bouquets. The streets were deserted; it was plain the entire population was assembled on one point. The blinds were closed, and the breeze penetrated into the houses under the hangings, which cast long black shades between their places of issue and the walls. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, chants struck the ears of the newly arrived travelers. A crowd in holiday garb appeared through the vapors of incense which mounted to the heavens in blue fleeces, and clouds of rose-leaves fluttered as high as the first stories. Above all heads were to be seen the cross and banners, the sacred symbols of religion. Then, beneath these crosses and banners, as if protected by them, walked a whole world of young girls clothed in white, crowned with corn-flowers. At the two sides of the street, inclosing the *cortège*, marched the guards of the garrison, carrying bouquets in the barrels of their muskets and on the points of their lances. This was the procession.

Whilst D'Artagnan and Porthos were looking on with critical glances, which disguised an extreme impatience to get forward, a magnificent daïs approached preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitent and twelve canons. A singer with a thundering voice—a man certainly picked out from all the voices of France, as was the drum-major of the imperial guard from all the giants of the empire—escorted by four other chanters,

who appeared to be there only to serve him as an accompaniment, made the air resound, and the windows of the houses vibrate. Under the dais appeared a pale and noble countenance, with black eyes, black hair streaked with threads of white, a delicate, compressed mouth, a prominent and angular chin. His head, full of graceful majesty was covered with the episcopal mitre, a head-dress which gave it, in addition to the character of sovereignty, that of asceticism and evangelic meditation.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, as this lofty countenance passed before him. The prelate started at the sound of the voice. He raised his large black eyes, with their long lashes, and turned them without hesitation towards the spot whence the exclamation proceeded. At a glance, he saw Porthos and D'Artagnan close to him. On his part, D'Artagnan, thanks to the keenness of his sight, had seen all, seized all. The full portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, never to leave it. One thing had particularly struck D'Artagnan. On perceiving him, Aramis had colored, then he had concentrated under his eyelids the fire of the look of the master, and the indefinable affection of the friend. It was evident that Aramis had asked himself this question:—"Why is D'Artagnan with Porthos, and what does he want at Vannes?" Aramis comprehended all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan, on turning his look upon him again, and seeing that he had not lowered his eyes. He knew the acuteness and intelligence of his friend; he feared to let him divine the secret of his blush and his astonishment. He was still the same Aramis, always having a secret to conceal. Therefore, to put an end to his look of an inquisitor, which it was necessary to get rid of at all events, as, at any price, a general extinguishes a battery which annoys him, Aramis stretched forth his beautiful white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst

of the pastoral ring; he cut the air with sign of the cross, and poured out his benediction upon his two friends. Perhaps, thoughtful and absent, D'Artagnan, impious in spite of himself, might not have bent beneath this holy benediction; but Porthos saw his distraction, and laying his friendly hand upon the back of his companion, he crushed him down towards the earth. D'Artagnan was forced to give way; indeed, he was little short of being flat on the ground. In the meantime Aramis had passed. D'Artagnan, like Antæus, had only touched the ground, and he turned towards Porthos, almost angry. But there was no mistaking the intention of the brave Hercules; it was a feeling of religious propriety that had influenced him. Besides, speech, with Porthos, instead of disguising his thought, always completed it.

"It is very polite of him," said he, to have given his benediction to us alone. Decidedly, he is a holy man, and a brave man." Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan made no reply.

"Observe, my friend," continued Porthos, "he has seen us; and, instead of continuing to walk on at the simple pace of the procession, as he did just now,—see, what a hurry he is in; do you see how the *cortége* is increasing its speed? He is eager to join us and embrace us, is that dear Aramis."

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan, aloud.—Then to himself:—"It is equally true, he has seen me, the fox, and will have time to prepare himself to receive me."

But the procession had passed; the road was free. D'Artagnan and Porthos walked straight up to the episcopal palace, which was surrounded by a numerous crowd anxious to see the prelate return. D'Artagnan remarked that this crowd was composed principally of citizens and military men. He recognized in the nature of these partisans the address of his friend. Aramis was

not the man to seek for a useless popularity. He cared very little for being beloved by people who could be of no service to him. Women, children, and old men, that is to say, the *cortège* of ordinary pastors, was not the *cortège* for him.

Ten minutes after the two friends had passed the threshold of the palace, Aramis returned like a triumphant conqueror; the soldiers presented arms to him as to a superior; the citizens bowed to him as to a friend and a patron, rather than as a head of the Church. There was something in Aramis resembling those Roman senators who had their doors always surrounded by clients. At the foot of the prison, he had a conference of half a minute with a Jesuit, who, in order to speak to him more secretly, passed his head under the *daïs*. He then re-entered his palace; the doors closed slowly, and the crowd melted away, whilst chants and prayers were still resounding abroad. It was a magnificent day. Earthly perfumes were mingled with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The city breathed happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had, all-powerfully, created this strength, this joy, this happiness, and spread everywhere these perfumes.

"Oh! oh!" said he, "Porthos has got fat; but Aramis is grown taller!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRANDEUR OF THE BISHOP OF VANNES.

PORTHOS and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D'Artagnan as guide. The worthy

baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgment of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who imposed upon him morally, a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion; for all these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of His Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D'Artagnan remarked at once, in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that His Greatness had just returned to his apartment and was preparing to appear in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock. After a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking mutually at each other with the white of their eyes, and turning their thumbs in all the different evolutions which go from north to south, a door of the chamber opened and His Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress, complete, of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command: his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his white hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine mustache, and the lengthened *royale* of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which, among elegant men and women of high fashion, never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural emanation. In this case only, the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the chamber, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which, whatever it might be, would have been cold on such an

occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most distrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D'Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal ardor. Porthos pressed the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D'Artagnan remarked that His Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already ten times had been near injuring his fingers covered with rings, by pounding his flesh in the vise of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and only presented flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed, against gold or the angles of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D'Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. This maneuver, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this maneuver; but he did not appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but, precisely because he was caught, he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it little imported to him, old condottiere as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. Aramis began the conversation.

"Ah! dear friend! my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what an excellent chance!"

"It is a chance, my reverend companion," said D'Artagnan, "that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you."

"Ah! indeed," said Aramis, without explosion, "you have been seeking me?"

"Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis," said Porthos, "and the proof is that he has unharbored me at Belle-Isle. That is amiable, is it not?"

"Ah! yes," said Aramis, "at Belle-Isle! certainly!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "there is my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack."

"At Belle-Isle!" said Aramis, "in that hole, in that desert! That is kind, indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D'Artagnan armed his mouth with a finesse almost ironical.

"Yes, I knew, but I was willing to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if, on seeing each other, our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which salutes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes, Porthos said hush! and you——"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Doubtless."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air.

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that; I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eyes over Aramis, "you don't mean to bury yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only I do not admit the word *bury*."

"But it seems to me, that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have found them here. What is there more beautiful, and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica. I find here, dear D'Artagnan, all that is opposite to what I formerly loved, and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is opposite to the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to salute me here, now and then, without diverting me from the road of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet, every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise, and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis, smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak; what brings you hither!" May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "it is nothing of that kind.—I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you, or Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe—particularly on seeing his friend in such humble guise—that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour of explanations was come, related the history of his English adventures. During the recital he saw ten times the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan; it was enthusiasm, it was delirium. When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see, then, I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart tells you so, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm was his look, he could not this time support the look of Aramis. He allowed, therefore, his eye to stray upon Porthos—like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure, and seeks another road.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular traveling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich, I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me!" cried Aramis. "Me! for the last year past I have not once crossed the sea."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "I should never have supposed you such a housekeeper."

"Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the Aramis of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor, ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age,—preliminary parleyings with death. I linger, my dear D'Artagnan, I linger."

"Well, that is all the better, my friend, for we shall probably be neighbors soon."

"Bah!" said Aramis, with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. "You, my neighbor!"

"*Mordieu*! yes."

"How so?"

"I am about to purchase some very profitable salt mines, which are situated between Pirial and Croisic. Imagine, my friend, a clear profit of twelve per cent. Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses; the ocean, faithful and regular, brings every twelve hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamt of such a speculation. Do not say anything about it, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the matter. I am to have three leagues of country for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and new defense. "I heard that you had had some difference with the court, but that you had

come out of it as you know how to get through everything, D'Artagnan, with the honors of war."

"I!" said the musketeer, with a burst of laughter that did not conceal his embarrassment: for, from these words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. "I! Oh, tell me all about that, pray, Aramis?"

"Yes, it was related to me, a poor bishop, lost in the middle of the *Landes*, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you, one morning, over the bridge of Blois to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation!"

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing more so."

"It was after that, then, that you went to the Comte de la Fère's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No, I did not know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man as you are, what you wanted to propose to us all four. I suspected you had something to do with that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been

seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he appeared to treat you like a friend, or rather, like a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil did you learn all that?" asked D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigation of Aramis had extended further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man, every night, lights a lantern to direct the barks that come from sea. He is concealed in his sentry-box, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest; he divines them; he calls them; he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher: from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all those I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a sentry-box."

"Well, what did I do when I came from England?"

"Ah! there," replied Aramis, "you get beyond my depth. I know nothing of you since your return. D'Artagnan, my eyes are dim. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again, and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you, solemnly! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* on the eve of my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! tell me all about it!"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Grève, and in

consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window, as he would have flung a sack full of flock."

"Come, that's pretty well," said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" said Porthos.

D'Artagnan remarked upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of two farmers of the revenues, friends of M. Fouquet, whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged them."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh, oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"MM. d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know those names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then," said Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis. "Why, it seems to me——"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death."

"That may be," said Porthos; "but in the place of M. Fouquet——"

Aramis was afraid Porthos was about to say something awkward, so interrupted him. "Come, D'Artagnan," said he; "this is quite enough about other people, let us talk a little about you."

"Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary, let me hear a little about you, Aramis."

"I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me."

"Nor of the Abbé d'Herblay even?"

"No, not even of him. You see a man whom Providence has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for."

"Providence?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange! I was told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you that?" cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent the color rising to his cheeks.

"*Ma foi!* why, Bazin?"

"The fool!"

"I do not say he is a man of genius, it is true; but he told me so; and after him, I repeat it to you."

"I have never seen M. Fouquet," replied Aramis, with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

"Well, but if you had seen him and known him, there is no harm in that," replied D'Artagnan. "M. Fouquet is a very good sort of a man."

"Humph!"

"A great politician." Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I only hold to the king and the pope."

"*Dame!* listen then," said D'Artagnan, in the most

natural tone imaginable. "I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's; the salt-mines I am about to buy are M. Fouquet's; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet's; the garrison is M. Fouquet's; the galleys are M. Fouquet's. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is a different master from the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as Louis."

"Thank God! I am not vassal to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own master," replied Aramis, who, during this conversation, followed with his eye every gesture of D'Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D'Artagnan was impassible and Porthos motionless; the thrusts aimed so skillfully were parried by an able adversary; not one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of what had been meant. He had held himself motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper; but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D'Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis played astonishment at every word of politics D'Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D'Artagnan, as the eternal indifference of D'Artagnan provoked the suspicions of Aramis. At length D'Artagnan, designedly, uttered the name of Colbert; he had reserved that stroke for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

"Oh! come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that is too strong! We must be careful, *mordieux!* we must be careful."

And he then gave Aramis all the information respecting M. Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather, the conversation, was prolonged till one o'clock in the morning between D'Artagnan and Aramis. Atten o'clock precisely, Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up and they sent him to bed. "Hum!" said he, "I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting you were talking about."

At one o'clock Aramis conducted D'Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the episcopal residence. Two servants were placed at his command. "To-morrow, at eight o'clock," said he, taking leave of D'Artagnan, "we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said D'Artagnan; "so late?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," said Aramis.

"That is true."

"Good-night, dear friend!" And he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D'Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door was closed, "Good!" cried he, "at five o'clock I will be on foot."

This determination being made, he went to bed and quietly "put two and two together," as people say.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH PORTHOS BEGINS TO BE SORRY FOR HAVING COME
WITH D'ARTAGNAN.

SCARCELY had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos's room. The giant who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out on the down bed. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which, with Porthos, resisted the noise of bells or the report of cannon; his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing movement of a ship. In a moment Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened the sound of his steps, besides which Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. He laid one hand on his shoulder—"Rouse," said he, "wake up, my dear Porthos." The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice,—it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated a danger. Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the depth of his sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" cried he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back again, fixing his great eyes in agitation upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like children who contend with their *bonne* to gain an hour or two more sleep.

"Thirty hours' riding," said Aramis, firmly. "You know there are good relays."

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

"Come, come! my friend," insisted the prelate with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. "And is it absolutely necessary that I should go, at once?"

"Urgently necessary."

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with his steps of a marble statue.

"Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!" said Aramis, "you will wake somebody."

"Ah! that's true," replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, "I forgot that; but be satisfied, I am on guard." And so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a vibrating and prolonged noise. This noise made the blood of Aramis boil, whilst it drew from Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. "How droll that is!" said he, in the same voice.

"Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud."

"True, true!" and he lowered his voice a half-note.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent."

"Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongue."

"You see I am doing my best," said Porthos, putting on his *haut de chausses*.

"Very well."

"This is something in haste?"

"It is more than that, it is serious, Porthos."

"Oh, oh!"

"D'Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?"

"Questioned me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Are you sure of that, Porthos?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself."

"He asked me what I was doing, and I told him—studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"'Castrametation'?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Gétard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed, I had rubbed out your writing, with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay ; but our friend has phenomenally keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the matter, is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning, you will have traversed fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skillful *valet de chambre* could have done. Porthos, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and confounded himself in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing him running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard, with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He, at the same time, held tight the horse's nose, to prevent him neighing. When arrived at the outward gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for: "Now, friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he in his ears; "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, sleep on horseback, but lose not a minute."

"That's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before mid-day."

"He shall."

"And do not forget *one* thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding out on a hunt for your *brevet* of duc and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours, in that case."

"Try."

"Then let go the bridle—and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, which set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes: when he was completely out of sight, he re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The *valet* placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light, nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own. D'Artagnan really suspected nothing; therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning, about half-past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not left their roosts. Not a servant appeared. Every door was closed.

"Good! all is still," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind: I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done." And D'Artagnan dressed himself. But, this time, he endeavored not to give to the costume of M. Agnan that *bourgeoise* and almost ecclesiastical rigidity he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person a little of that military character, the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or affected to make free with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony. Aramis was asleep or feigned to be so. A large book lay open upon

his night-desk, a wax-light was still burning in its silver sconce. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the quiescence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos—he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for, instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! *Ma foi!* Sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a habit of waking with the day, sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep!" said Aramis: "take care; I had reckoned upon them, and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that, formerly, you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess, that it is not for the sake of sleeping, that you have put me off till eight o'clock."

"I have been afraid you would laugh at me, if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearance than a simple cleric."

"*Mordious!* Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! *Vivent les apparences*, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I had allowed to escape me."

"Must I leave you, then?"

"I want time to collect my thoughts, my friend, and for my usual prayers."

"Well I leave you to them; but on account of that poor pagan, D'Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg; I thirst for speech with you."

"Well, D'Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half——"

"An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible."

Aramis began to laugh.

"Still agreeable, still young, still gay," said he. "You have come into my diocese to set me quarreling with grace."

"Bah!"

"And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit his lips.

"Well," said he, "I will take the sin on my own head, favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross, favor me with one pater, and we will part."

"Hush!" said Aramis, "we are already no longer alone, I hear strangers coming up."

"Well, dismiss them."

"Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday; it is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff? Well, so be it!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I will go and wake Porthos, and remain in his company till you have finished the conference."

Aramis did not stir, his brow remained unbent, he betrayed himself by no gesture or word; "Go," said he, as D'Artagnan advanced to the door.

"*A propos*, do you know where Porthos sleeps?"

"No, but I will inquire."

"Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thank you! *au revoir*." And D'Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not passed away when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation as he had found him formerly in the auberge at Crèveceur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

"What is it?" said Aramis, quietly. "You have apparently, something to say to me, my friend."

"It is," replied D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "it is that Porthos is not in his apartment."

"Indeed," said Aramis, calmly; "are you sure?"

"*Pardieu!* I came from his chamber."

"Where can he be, then?"

"That is what I am asking *you*."

"And have not you inquired?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what answer did you get?"

"That Porthos, often walking out in a morning, without saying anything, had probably gone out."

"What did you do, then?"

"I went to the stables," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly.

"What to do?"

"To see if Porthos had departed on horseback."

"And?" interrogated the bishop.

"Well, there is a horse missing, stall No. 3, Goliath."

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not exempt from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

"Oh! I guess how it is," said Aramis, after having considered for a moment, "Porthos is gone out to give us a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes; the canal which goes from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos's favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for breakfast."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else can he be? I would lay a wager he took a gun with him."

"Well, that is possible," said D'Artagnan.

"Do one thing, my friend. Get on horseback, and join him."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan, "I will."

"Shall I go with you?"

"No, thank you; Porthos is a rather remarkable man: I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebuse?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it: use the horse as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When arrived at the door, the servant drew on one side to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A knitting of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the steps of his horse on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" asked the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see in the *Landes*, or on the beach, the colossal profile of Porthos. He persisted in fancying he could trace a horse's steps in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three hours; during two of which he went forward in search of his friend—in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have crossed," said he, "and I shall find them waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken. He no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the sea-shore. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned.

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have in-

duced you to make such a useless search ; but, about seven o'clock, the almoner of Saint-Paterne came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Gétard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to make a tour to Belle-Isle."

"But tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, I should think."

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blindest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back." In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, from whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a part of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more and more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous ; excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimboeuf, and delicious game from the moors, constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After the repast,

"You offered me an arquebuse," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"Whilst waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the trophy."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till mid-day."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but come back to dinner."

"*Pardieu!* the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back." And thereupon D'Artagnan quitted his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebuse; but, instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked in vain to observe if anybody saw him; he could discern neither thing nor person. He engaged a little fishing-boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true, he had not been followed; only a Jesuit brother, placed in the top of the steeple of his church, had not, since the morning, by the help of an excellent glass, lost sight of one of his steps. At three-quarters past eleven, Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing towards Belle-Isle. The voyage was rapid; a good north north-east wind drove him towards the isle. As he approached, his eyes were constantly fixed upon the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications, the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos should stand out against a slightly clouded sky; but his search was vain. He landed without having seen anything; and learnt from the first soldier interrogated by him, that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D'Artagnan ordered his little bark to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day. The breeze had veered from the north north-east

to the south-east; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau, as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had touched the continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D'Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that short passage, the deck alone of the vessel, upon which he stamped backwards and forwards for three hours, could testify. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the promptitude of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, and yet with reserve; but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short—thanks to that heat of expression which is to *secrets* what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts—to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found, in the vestibule of the palace, the *valet de chambre*, who closed the passage, while smiling upon him with a stupid air.

“Monseigneur?” cried D'Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Moved for an instant, the valet resumed his station.

“Monseigneur?” said he.

“Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, *imbécile*?”

“Yes; you are the Chevalier d'Artagnan.”

“Then let me pass.”

“It is of no use.”

“Why of no use?”

“Because His Greatness is not at home.”

“What! His Greatness is not at home? where is he then?”

“Gone.”

“Gone?”

“Yes.”

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but, perhaps he tells monsieur le chevalier."

"And how? where? in what fashion?"

"In this letter, which he gave me for monsieur le chevalier." And the *valet de chambre* drew a letter from his pocket.

"Give it to me, then, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at the first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read:—

"DEAR FRIEND,—An affair of the most urgent nature calls me to a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again before I set out; but I lose that hope in thinking that you are going, no doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle, with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better, and for a longer time, profited by your excellent company."

"*Mordieux!*" cried D'Artagnan. "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But those laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped like a monkey, cheated with an empty nutshell!" And with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the smirking *valet de chambre*, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter, was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan, therefore took the post, and chose a horse, which he soon caused to demonstrate, with good spurs and a light hand, that deer are not the swiftest animals in nature.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN MAKES ALL SPEED, PORTHOS SNORES,
AND ARAMIS COUNSELS.

FROM thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having interdicted his door, was working in the cabinet of his house at Saint Mandé, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage, drawn by four horses steaming with sweat, entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was, probably, expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. Whilst M. Fouquet rose from his bureau and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps of the door, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the *valet* upon whom he was not leaning, sprang up the *perron*, and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door: Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes," said he.

"Very well!" replied his master.

Then, leaning over the banister of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps,—

"Ah, dear friend!" said he, "you, so soon!"

"Yes; I, myself, monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see."

"Oh! my poor friend," said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, on which Aramis leant, whilst the servants drew back respectfully.

"Bah!" replied Aramis, "it is nothing, since I am here; the principal thing was that I should *get* here, and here I am."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of the cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"No one observes us?—no one can hear us?"

"Be satisfied; nobody."

"Is M. du Vallon arrived?"

"Yes."

"And you have received my letter?"

"Yes. The affair is serious, apparently, since it necessitates your attendance in Paris, at a moment when your presence was so urgent elsewhere."

"You are right, it could not be more serious."

"Thank you! thank you! What is it about? But, for God's sake! before anything else, take time to breathe, dear friend. You are so pale, you frighten me."

"I am really in great pain. But, for Heaven's sake, think nothing about me. Did M. du Vallon tell you nothing, when he delivered the letter to you?"

"No; I heard a great noise; I went to the window; I saw at the foot of the *perron* a sort of horseman of marble; I went down, he held the letter out to me, and his horse fell down dead."

"But he?"

"He fell with the horse; he was lifted, and carried to an apartment. Having read the letter, I went up to him, in hopes of obtaining more ample information; but he was asleep, and, after such a fashion, that it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him; I gave orders

that his boots should be cut from off his legs, and that he should be left quite undisturbed."

"So far well; now, this is the question in hand, monseigneur. You have seen M. d'Artagnan in Paris, have you not?"

"*Certes*, and think him a man of intelligence, and even a man of heart; although he did bring about the death of our dear friends, Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Alas! yes, I heard of that. At Tours I met the courier who was bringing me the letter from Gourville, and the dispatches from Pellisson. Have you seriously reflected on that event, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And in it you perceived a direct attack upon your sovereignty?"

"And do you believe it to be so?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Well, I must confess, that sad idea occurred to me likewise."

"Do not blind yourself, monsieur, in the name of Heaven! Listen attentively to me,—I return to D'Artagnan."

"I am all attention."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"He came here for money."

"With what kind of order?"

"With an order from the king."

"Direct?"

"Signed by his majesty."

"There, then! Well, D'Artagnan has been to Belle-Isle; he was disguised; he came in the character of some sort of an *intendant*, charged by his master to purchase salt-mines. Now, D'Artagnan has no other master but the king; he came, then, sent by the king. He saw Porthos."

"Who is Porthos?"

"I beg your pardon, I made a mistake. He saw M. du Vallon at Belle-Isle; and he knows, as well as you and I do, that Belle-Isle is fortified."

"And you think that the king sent him there?" said Fouquet, pensively.

"I certainly do."

"And D'Artagnan, in the hands of the king, is a dangerous instrument?"

"The most dangerous imaginable."

"Then I formed a correct opinion of him at the first glance."

"How so?"

"I wished to attach him to myself."

"If you judged him to be the bravest, the most acute, and the most adroit man in France, you judged correctly."

"He must be had then, at any price."

"D'Artagnan?"

"Is not that your opinion?"

"It may be my opinion, but you will never get him."

"Why?"

"Because we have allowed the time to go by. He was dissatisfied with the court, we should have profited by that; since that, he has passed into England; there he powerfully assisted in the restoration, there he gained a fortune, and, after all, he returned to the service of the king. Well, if he has returned to the service of the king, it is because he is well paid in that service."

"We will pay him even better, that is all."

"Oh! monsieur, excuse me; D'Artagnan has a high respect for his word, and where that is once engaged he keeps it."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Fouquet, with great inquietude.

"At present, the principal thing is to parry a dangerous blow."

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Listen."

"But D'Artagnan will come and render an account to the king of his mission."

"Oh, we have time enough to think about that."

"How so? You are much in advance of him, I presume?"

"Nearly ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours——"

Aramis shook his pale head. "Look at these clouds which flit across the heavens; at these swallows which cut the air. D'Artagnan moves more quickly than the clouds or the birds; D'Artagnan is the wind which carries them."

"A strange man!"

"I tell you, he is superhuman, monsieur. He is of my own age, and I have known him these five-and-thirty years."

"Well?"

"Well, listen to my calculation, monsieur. I sent M. du Vallon off to you two hours after midnight. M. du Vallon was eight hours in advance of me; when did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"About four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I gained four upon him; and yet Porthos is a staunch horseman, and he has left on the road eight dead horses, whose bodies I came to successively. I rode post fifty leagues; but I have the gout, the gravel, and what else I know not; so that fatigue kills me. I was obliged to dismount at Tours; since that, rolling along in a carriage, half-dead, sometimes overturned, drawn upon the sides, and sometimes on the back of the carriage, always with four spirited horses at full gallop, I have arrived—arrived, gaining four hours upon Porthos; but, see you, D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundred-weight, as

Porthos does; D'Artagnan has not the gout and gravel, as I have; he is not a horseman, he is a centaur. D'Artagnan, look you, set out for Belle-Isle when I set out for Paris; and D'Artagnan, notwithstanding my ten hours' advance, D'Artagnan will arrive within two hours after me."

"But, then, accidents?"

"He never meets with accidents."

"Horses may fail him."

"He will run as fast as a horse."

"Good God! what a man!"

"Yes, he is a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he represents in my eyes the culminating point of human power; but, whilst loving and admiring him, I fear him, and am on my guard against him. Now then, I resume, monsieur; in two hours D'Artagnan will be here; be beforehand with him. Go to the Louvre, and see the king before he sees D'Artagnan."

"What shall I say to the king?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Herblay! Monsieur d'Herblay," cried Fouquet, "what projects crushed all at once!"

"After one project that has failed, there is always another project that may lead to fortune; we should never despair. Go, monsieur, and go at once."

"But that garrison, so carefully chosen, the king will change it directly."

"That garrison, monsieur, was the king's when it entered Belle-Isle; it is yours now; it is the same with all garrisons after a fortnight's occupation. Let things go on, monsieur. Do you see any inconvenience in having an army at the end of a year, instead of two regiments? Do you not see that your garrison of to-day will make you partisans at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse—in

short, wherever they may be sent to? Go to the king, monsieur; go; time flies, and D'Artagnan, while we are losing time, is flying, like an arrow, along the high-road."

"Monsieur d'Herblay, you know that each word from you is a germ which fructifies in my thoughts. I will go to the Louvre."

"Instantly, will you not?"

"I only ask time to change my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan has no need to pass through St. Mandé; but will go straight to the Louvre; that is cutting off an hour from the advantage that yet remains to us."

"D'Artagnan may have everything except my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes." And, without losing a second, Fouquet gave orders for his departure.

Aramis had only time to say to him, "Return as quickly as you go: for I shall await you impatiently."

Five minutes after the superintendent was flying along the road to Paris. During this time, Aramis desired to be shown the chamber in which Porthos was sleeping. At the door of Fouquet's cabinet he was folded in the arms of Pellisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to see him. Aramis received, with that friendly dignity which he knew so well how to assume, these caresses, respectful as earnest: but all at once stopping on the landing-place, "What is that I hear up yonder?"

There was, in fact, a hoarse, growling kind of noise, like the roar of a hungry tiger, or an impatient lion. "Oh, that is nothing," said Pellisson, smiling.

"Well; but——"

"It is M. du Vallon snoring."

"Ah! true," said Aramis: "I had forgotten. No one but he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pellisson, to inquire if he wants anything."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?"

"Oh, certainly;" and both entered the chamber. Porthos was stretched upon the bed; his face was violet rather than red; his eyes were swelled; his mouth was wide open. The roaring which escaped from the deep cavities of his chest made the glass of the windows vibrate. To those developed and clearly defined muscles starting from his face, to his hair matted with sweat, to the energetic heaving of his chin and shoulders, it was impossible to refuse a certain degree of admiration. Strength carried to this point is semi-divine. The Herculean legs and feet of Porthos had, by swelling, burst his stockings; all the strength of his huge body was converted into the rigidity of stone. Porthos moved no more than does the giant of granite which reclines upon the plains of Agrigentum. According to Pellisson's orders, his boots had been cut off, for no human power could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as they would have pulled capstans; and yet all this did not awaken him. They had hacked off his boots in fragments, and his legs had fallen back upon the bed. They then cut off the rest of his clothes, carried him to a bath, in which they let him soak a considerable time. They then put on him clean linen, and placed him in a well-warmed bed—the whole with efforts and pains which might have roused a dead man, but which did not make Porthos open an eye, or interrupt for a second the formidable diapason of his snoring. Aramis wished on his part, with his nervous nature, armed with extraordinary courage, to outbrave fatigue, and employ himself with Gourville and Pellisson, but he fainted in the chair in which he had persisted sitting. He was carried into the adjoining room, where the repose of bed soon soothed his failing brain.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH MONSIEUR FOUQUET ACTS.

IN the meantime Fouquet was hastening to the Louvre, at the best speed of his English horses. The king was at work with Colbert. All at once the king became thoughtful. The two sentences of death he had signed on mounting his throne sometimes recurred to his memory: they were two black spots which he saw with his eyes open; two spots of blood which he saw when his eyes were closed. "Monsieur," said he rather sharply, to the intendant; "it sometimes seems to me that those two men you made me condemn were not very great culprits."

"Sire, they were picked out from the herd of the farmers of the financiers, which wanted decimating."

"Picked out by whom?"

"By necessity, sire," replied Colbert, coldly.

"Necessity!—a great word," murmured the young king.

"A great goddess, sire."

"They were devoted friends of the superintendent, were they not?"

"Yes, sire; friends who would have given up their lives for Monsieur Fouquet."

"They have given them, monsieur," said the king.

"That is true;—but uselessly, by good luck,—which was not their intention."

"How much money had these men fraudulently obtained?"

"Ten millions, perhaps ; of which six have been confiscated."

"And is that money in my coffers?" said the king with a certain air of repugnance.

"It is there, sire : but this confiscation, whilst threatening M. Fouquet, has not touched him."

"You conclude, then, M. Colbert——"

"That if M. Fouquet has raised against your majesty a troop of factious rioters to extricate his friends from punishment, he will raise an army when he has in turn to extricate *himself* from punishment."

The king darted at his confidant one of those looks which resemble the livid fire of a flash of lightning, one of those looks which illuminate the darkness of the basest consciences. "I am astonished," said he, "that, thinking such things of M. Fouquet you did not come to give me your counsels thereupon."

"Counsels upon what, sire?"

"Tell me, in the first place, clearly and precisely, what you think, M. Colbert."

"Upon what subject, sire?"

"Upon the conduct of M. Fouquet."

"I think, sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with attracting all the money to himself, as M. Mazarin did, and by that means depriving your majesty of one part of your power, still wishes to attract to himself all the friends of easy life and pleasure—of what idlers call poetry, and politicians, corruption. I think that, by holding the subjects of your majesty in pay, he trespasses upon the royal prerogative, and cannot, if this continues so, be long in placing your majesty among the weak and the obscure."

"How would you qualify all these projects, M. Colbert?"

"The projects of M. Fouquet, sire?"

"Yes."

"They are called crimes of *lèse majesté*."

"And what is done to criminals guilty of *lèse majesté*?"

"They are arrested, tried, and punished."

"You are quite sure that M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?"

"I can say more, sire; there is even a commencement of the execution of it."

"Well, then, I return to that which I was saying, M. Colbert."

"And you were saying, sire?"

"Give me counsel."

"Pardon me, sire; but, in the first place, I have something to add."

"Say—what?"

"An evident, palpable, material proof of treason."

"And what is that?"

"I have just learnt that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, sire."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, sire, what soldiers there are in Belle-Isle?"

"No, *ma foi*! Do you?"

"I am ignorant, likewise, sire; I should therefore propose to your majesty to send somebody to Belle-Isle?"

"Who?"

"Me, for instance."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Inform myself whether, after the example of the ancient feudal lords, M. Fouquet was battlementing his walls."

"And with what purpose could he do that?"

"With the purpose of defending himself some day against his king."

"But, if it be thus, M. Colbert," said Louis, "we must immediately do as you say: M. Fouquet must be arrested."

"That is impossible."

"I thought I had already told you, monsieur, that I suppressed that word in my service."

"The service of your majesty cannot prevent M. Fouquet from being surintendant-général."

"Well?"

"That, in consequence of holding that post, he has for him all the parliament, as he has all the army by his largesses, literature by his favors, and the *noblesse* by his presents."

"That is to say, then, that I can do nothing against M. Fouquet?"

"Absolutely nothing,—at least at present, sire."

"You are a sterile counselor, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, sire; for I will not confine myself to pointing out the peril to your majesty."

"Come, then, where shall we begin to undermine this Colossus; let us see;" and his majesty began to laugh bitterly.

"He has grown great by money: kill him by money, sire."

"If I were to deprive him of his charge?"

"A bad means, sire."

"The good—the good, then?"

"Ruin him, sire, that is the way."

"But how?"

"Occasions will not be wanting; take advantage of all occasions."

"Point them out to me."

"Here is one at once. His royal highness Monsieur is about to be married: his nuptials must be magnificent. That is a good occasion for your majesty to demand a mil-

lion of M. Fouquet. M. Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres down when he need not pay more than five thousand, will easily find that million when your majesty demands it."

"That is all very well; I *will* demand it," said Louis.

"If your majesty will sign the *ordonnance*, I will have the money got together myself." And Colbert pushed a paper before the king, and presented a pen to him.

At that moment the usher opened the door and announced monsieur le surintendant. Louis turned pale. Colbert let the pen fall, and drew back from the king, over whom he extended his black wings like an evil spirit. The superintendent made his entrance like a man of the court, to whom a single glance was sufficient to make him appreciate the situation. That situation was not very encouraging for Fouquet, whatever might be his consciousness of strength. The small black eye of Colbert, dilated by envy, and the limpid eye of Louis XIV. inflamed by anger, signalled some pressing danger. Courtiers are, with regard to court rumors, like old soldiers, who distinguish through the blasts of wind and bluster of leaves the sound of the distant steps of an armed troop. They can, after having listened, tell pretty nearly how many men are marching, how many arms resound, how many cannons roll. Fouquet had then only to interrogate the silence which his arrival had produced: he found it big with menacing revelations. The king allowed him time enough to advance as far as the middle of the chamber. His adolescent modesty commanded this forbearance of the moment. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

"Sire," said he, "I was impatient to see your majesty."

"What for?" asked Louis.

"To announce some good news to you."

Colbert, minus grandeur of person, less largeness of heart, resembled Fouquet in many points. He had the

same penetration, the same knowledge of men ; moreover, that great power of self-compression which gives to hypocrites time to reflect, and gather themselves up to take a spring. He guessed that Fouquet was going to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes glittered ominously.

"What news?" asked the king. Fouquet placed a roll of papers on the table.

"Let your majesty have the goodness to cast your eyes over this work," said he. The king slowly unfolded the paper.

"Plans?" said he.

"Yes, sire."

"And what are these plans?"

"A new fortification, sire."

"Ah, ah!" said the king, "you amuse yourself with tactics and strategies then, M. Fouquet?"

"I occupy myself with everything that may be useful to the reign of your majesty," replied Fouquet.

"Beautiful descriptions!" said the king, looking at the design.

"Your majesty comprehends, without doubt," said Fouquet, bending over the paper; "here is the circle of the walls, here are the forts, there the advanced works."

"And what do I see here, monsieur?"

"The sea."

"The sea all round?"

"Yes, sire."

"And what is, then, the name of this place of which you show me the plan?"

"Sire, it is Belle-Isle-en-Mer," replied Fouquet with simplicity.

At this word, at this name, Colbert made so marked a movement, that the king turned round to enforce the necessity for reserve. Fouquet did not appear to be the

least in the world concerned by the movement of Colbert, or the king's signal.

"Monsieur," continued Louis, "you have then fortified Belle-Isle?"

"Yes, sire; and I have brought the plan and the accounts to your majesty," replied Fouquet; "I have expended sixteen hundred thousand livres in this operation."

"What to do?" replied Louis, coldly, having taken the initiative from a malicious look of the intendant.

"For an aim very easy to seize," replied Fouquet. "Your majesty was on cool terms with Great Britain."

"Yes; but since the restoration of King Charles II. I have formed an alliance with him."

"A month since, sire, your majesty has truly said; but it is more than six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun."

"Then they have become useless."

"Sire, fortifications are never useless. I fortified Belle-Isle against MM. Monk and Lambert and all those London citizens who were playing at soldiers. Belle-Isle will be ready fortified against the Dutch, against whom either England or your majesty cannot fail to make war."

The king was again silent, and looked askant at Colbert. "Belle-Isle, I believe," added Louis, "is yours, M. Fouquet?"

"No, sire."

"Whose then?"

"Your majesty's."

Colbert was seized with as much terror as if a gulf had opened beneath his feet. Louis started with admiration, either at the genius or the devotion of Fouquet.

"Explain yourself, monsieur," said he.

"Nothing more easy, sire; Belle-Isle is one of my estates; I have fortified it at my own expense. But as nothing in the world can oppose a subject making an

humble present to his king, I offer your majesty the proprietorship of the estate, of which you will leave me the usufruct. Belle-Isle, as a place of war, ought to be occupied by the king. Your majesty will be able, henceforth, to keep a safe garrison there."

Colbert felt almost sinking down upon the floor. To keep himself from falling, he was obliged to hold by the columns of the wainscoting.

"This is a piece of great skill in the art of war that you have exhibited here, monsieur," said Louis.

"Sire, the initiative did not come from me," replied Fouquet; "many officers have inspired me with it. The plans themselves have been made by one of the most distinguished engineers."

"His name?"

"M. du Vallon.

"M. du Vallon?" resumed Louis; "I do not know him. It is much to be lamented, M. Colbert," continued he, "that I do not know the names of the men of talent who do honor to my reign." And while saying these words he turned towards Colbert. The latter felt himself crushed, the sweat flowed from his brow, no word presented itself to his lips, he suffered an inexpressible martyrdom. "You will recollect that name," added Louis XIV.

Colbert bowed, but was paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace. Fouquet continued:

"The masonries are of Roman concrete; the architects amalgamated it for me after the best accounts of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" asked Louis.

"Oh! sire, that concerns your majesty; it did not become me to place cannon in my own house, unless your majesty had told me it was yours."

Louis began to float, undetermined between the hatred which this so powerful man inspired him with, and the

pity he felt for the other, so cast down, who seemed to him the counterfeit of the former. But the consciousness of his kingly duty prevailed over the feelings of the man, and he stretched out his finger to the paper."

"It must have cost you a great deal of money to carry these plans into execution," said he.

"I believe I had the honor of telling your majesty the amount?"

"Repeat it if you please, I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres! you are enormously rich, monsieur."

"It is your majesty who is rich, since Belle-Isle is yours."

"Yes, thank you; but however rich I may be, M. Fouquet——" The king stopped.

"Well, sire?" asked the superintendent.

"I foresee the moment when I shall want money."

"You, sire?—And at what moment, then?"

"To-morrow, for example."

"Will your majesty do me the honor to explain yourself?"

"My brother is going to marry the English Princess."

"Well?—sire."

"Well, I ought to give the bride a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"That is but just, sire."

"Then I shall want money."

"No doubt."

"I shall want——" Louis hesitated. The sum he was going to demand was the same that he had been obliged to refuse Charles II. He turned towards Colbert, that he might give the blow.

"I shall want, to-morrow——" repeated he, looking at Colbert.

"A million," said the latter, bluntly: delighted to take his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back upon the intendant to listen to the king. He did not turn round, but waited till the king repeated, or rather murmured, "A million."

"Oh! sire," replied Fouquet disdainfully, "a million! What will your majesty do with a million?"

"It appears to me, nevertheless——" said Louis XIV.

"That is not more than is spent at the nuptials of one of the most petty princes of Germany."

"Monsieur!"

"Your majesty must have two millions at least. The horses alone, would run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening."

"How," said the king, "sixteen hundred thousand livres?"

"Look, sire," replied Fouquet, without even turning towards Colbert, "I know that wants four hundred thousand livres of the two millions. But this monsieur of l'intendance" (pointing over his shoulder to Colbert, who if possible, became paler, behind him) "has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine."

The king turned round to look at Colbert.

"But——" said the latter.

"Monsieur," continued Fouquet, still speaking indirectly to Colbert, "monsieur has received, a week ago, sixteen hundred thousand livres; he has paid a hundred thousand livres to the guards, sixty-four thousand livres to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss, a hundred and thirty thousand for provisions, a thousand for arms, ten thousand for accidental expenses; I do not err, then, in reckoning upon nine hundred thousand livres that are left." Then turning towards Colbert, like a disdainful head of office towards his inferior, "Take care, mon-

sieur," said he, "that those nine hundred thousand livres be remitted to his majesty this evening, in gold."

"But," said the king, "that will make two millions five hundred thousand livres."

"Sire, the five hundred thousand livres over will serve as pocket money for his Royal Highness. You understand, Monsieur Colbert, this evening before eight o'clock."

And with these words, bowing respectfully to the king, the superintendent made his exit backwards, without honoring with a single look the envious man, whose head he had just half-shaved.

Colbert tore his ruffles to pieces in his rage, and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet had not passed the door of the cabinet, when an usher, pushing by him, exclaimed: "A courier from Bretagne for his majesty."

"M. d'Herblay was right," murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; "an hour and-fifty-five minutes. It was quite true."

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN FINISHES BY AT LENGTH PLACING HIS HAND UPON HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

THE reader guesses beforehand whom the usher preceded in announcing the courier from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully at every step, on which resounded the clink of his blood-stained spurs. He perceived in the doorway he was passing through the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who, an hour before, was bringing him ruin and

death. D'Artagnan found in his goodness of heart, and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception of this man; he bowed then, also, much more from benevolence and compassion, than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: "Fly." But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king, and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously, and could save nobody. D'Artagnan then contented himself with bowing to Fouquet, and entered. At this moment the king floated between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and as rapid as if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, devouring humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him:—

"Ah! Monsieur Colbert; you have then nine hundred thousand livres at the intendance?" Colbert, suffocated, bowed, but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan, by the eyes and ears, at once.

The first word of Louis to his musketeer, as if he wished it to contrast with what he was saying at the moment, was a kind "good day." His second was to send away Colbert. The latter left the king's cabinet, pallid and tottering, whilst D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my presenting myself thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, monsieur."

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified; Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its ports contain three corsairs; and the side batteries only await their cannon."

"I know all that, monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really correct, sire: I saw a similar one on the spot."

D'Artagnan's brow became clouded.

"Ah! I understand all. Your majesty did not trust to me alone, but sent some other person," said he, in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, monsieur, in which I have learnt what I know, so that I know it?"

"Sire, sire," said the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your majesty, that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times the breaking of my neck, to salute me on my arrival with such intelligence. Sire, when people are not trusted, or are deemed insufficient they should scarcely be employed." And D'Artagnan, with a movement perfectly military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood. The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph.

"Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle is mine."

"That is well ! that is well, sire, I ask but one thing more," replied D'Artagnan.—"My discharge."

"What ! your discharge ?"

"Without doubt I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without earning it, or rather by gaining it badly.—My discharge, sire !"

"Oh, oh !"

"I ask for my discharge, or I will take it."

"You are angry, monsieur ?"

"I have reason, *mordieu* ! Thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride night and day, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hung—and another arrives before me ! Come, sire, I am a fool ! —My discharge, sire !"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Louis, leaning his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I tell you will not at all affect that which I promised you. A king's word given must be kept." And the king going straight to his table, opened a drawer, and took out a folded paper. "Here is your commission of captain of musketeers ; you have won it, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and scanned it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle, but, moreover, for your brave intervention at the Place de Grève. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah, ah !" said D'Artagnan, without his self-command being able to prevent a blush from mounting to his eyes —"you know that also, sire ?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment, when it was his object to read men's minds. "You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak

freely, monsieur: you know that I told you, once for all, that you are to be always quite frank with me."

"Well, sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hung."

"Is this quite true you tell me?"

"And why should your majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I know you well, monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your majesty is deceived, and greatly; yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword on account of the results that action produced; the poor men who were hung, sire, were neither your enemies nor mine; and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, M. d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes, you were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Grève."

"No, sire, no," said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to engross to himself all the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordieu*! and as your majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion, too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, sire; a young man. Oh! your majesty must accept my compliments, you are as well informed of things out of doors as things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

"M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d'Ar-

tagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else."

"That is fortunate!"

"But he also said much good of that young man."

"And with justice," said the musketeer.

"In short, it appears that this young man is a fire-eater," said Louis, in order to sharpen the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

"A fire-eater! Yes, sire," repeated D'Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king's attention to Rasul.

"Do you not know his name?"

"Well, I think——"

"You know him then?"

"I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, sire."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the king.

"Well, sire! I have known him ever since he was born, that is all."

"Do you affirm that?"

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he not forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"Certainly, sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fère, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne comes of a valiant race, sire."

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. Mazarin, on the part of king Charles II., to offer me his alliance?"

"Exactly, sire."

"And the Comte de la Fère is a great soldier, say you?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king, your father, than there are, at present, months in the happy life of your majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip.

"That is well, M. d'Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fère is your friend, say you?"

"For about forty years; yes, sire. Your majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Should you be glad to see this young man, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared. "Call M. de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of monsieur le prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and, on seeing D'Artagnan, smiled at him with that charming smile which is only found upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully, that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not overshadow his own, admired his beauty, strength and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked monsieur le prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur le prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the exchange."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love, within

certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties, and flattering, even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with a voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father; "Sire, it is not from to-day that I belong to your majesty."

"Oh! no, I know," said the king; "you mean your enterprise of the Grève. That day, you were truly mine, monsieur."

"Sire, it is not of that day, I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the presence of such a man as M. d'Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your majesty."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "what was that circumstance? Tell me, monsieur."

"This is it, sire.—When I was setting out on my first campaign, that is to say, to join the army of monsieur le prince, M. le Comte de la Fère came to conduct me as far as Saint-Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. wait, upon the lowest steps of the funeral *basilique*, a successor, whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty represented by you—incarnate in you, sire—to serve it in word, in thought, and in action. I swore, and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your majesty, and nothing else; and, on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison."

Raoul was silent, and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that was well spoken! was it not, your majesty? A good race! a noble race!"

"Yes," murmured the agitated king, without, however, daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than contact with a nature intrinsically noble. "Yes, monsieur, you say truly:—wherever you were, you were the king's. But in changing your garrison, believe me you will find an advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had to say to him. And with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

"Is there anything else, monsieur, of which you have to inform me?" said the king, when he found himself again alone with D'Artagnan.

"Yes, sire, and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning."

"What do you tell me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth, you terrify me, M. d'Artagnan."

"Sire, this word was pronounced to me by a *piqueur*, who wore crape on his arm."

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not warned of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh! do not be angry, sire," said D'Artagnan; "neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel with your servant; the courier from Blois will not be here these two hours, and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I only passed him on the thither side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and comprising in those three words

all that his memory recalled of that symbol of opposing sentiments.

"Eh! yes, sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, "it is thus the past flies away."

"That is true, monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future; and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "and now——"

"You are right, monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred leagues you have just ridden. Go, monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers, and when you have reposed a little, come and place yourself at my disposal."

"Sire, absent or present, I am always yours."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LOVER AND HIS MISTRESS.

WHILST the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois, around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; whilst the *bourgeois* of the city were thinking out his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; whilst madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to fly the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride; other interests and other

prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sounds of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the interior court—a window that we are acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of the sun, for the sun appeared to care little for the loss France had just suffered ; a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was the consequence of that death, were a young woman and a young man. The latter personage, a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes dull, making good use of two large eyes, shaded with long eyelashes, was short of stature and swart of skin ; he smiled with an enormous, but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, leant from time to time very lovingly towards his interlocutrix, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety had a right to require. The young girl—we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun—the young girl presented a singular mixture of shyness and reflection ; she was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious ; but, let us hasten to say, she was more frequently charming than beautiful. These two appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion—half-bantering, half-serious.

“Now, Monsieur Malicorne,” said the young girl, “does

it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably?"

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure," replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we are able——"

"Good! there he is bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you; quit that lawyer's logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility."

"Clerk, I am Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Demoiselle, I am Monsieur Malicorne."

"Alas, I know it well, and you overwhelm me by your rank; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, no, I don't overwhelm you: say what you have to tell me—say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste*! there's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

"Ah, no; I am come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry the king's brother."

"Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out."

"Oh!"

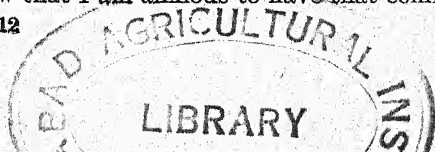
"Yes: for really you exasperate me."

"There, there. Patience, mademoiselle."

"You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why. Go!"

"Tell me, and I will answer you frankly, yes, if the thing be true."

"You know that I am anxious to have that commission



of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your credit."

"Who, I?" Malicorne cast down his eyes, joined his hands, and assumed his sullen air. "And what credit can the poor clerk of a procureur have, pray?"

"Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is not in the secrets of monsieur le prince for nothing."

"An advantage which is confined to lending monseigneur money."

"In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing."

"You flatter me!"

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Since I maintain that I have no credit, and you maintain I have."

"Well, then,—my commission?"

"Well,—your commission?"

"Shall I have it, or shall I not?"

"You shall have it."

"Ay, but when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"How—in your pocket?"

"Yes."

And, with a smile, Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which mademoiselle seized as a prey, and which she read eagerly. As she read, her face brightened.

"Malicorne," cried she after having read it, "In truth, you are a good lad."

"What for, mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not." And she burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

"I do not understand you," said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. "I have declared my sentiments to you," continued Malicorne. "You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have embraced me once without laughing, and that is all I want."

"All?" said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which wounded pride was visible.

"Absolutely all, mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!"—And this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head quietly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; "let us not dispute about it."

"And why not?"

"Because during the year which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you."

"Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?"

"Because I had been sufficiently impertinent for that."

"Oh, that,—yes, that's true."

"You see plainly that you are forced to avow it," said Malicorne.

"Monsieur Malicorne!"

"Don't let us be angry; if you have retained me, then it has not been without cause."

"It is not, at least, because I love you," cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even say that, at this moment, I am certain that you hate me."

"Oh, you have never spoken so truly."

"Well, on my part I detest you."

"Ah, I take the act."

"Take it. You find me brutal and foolish ; on my part I find you have a harsh voice, and your face is too often distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger ; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your robe. But, in five minutes, you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so."

"I doubt it."

"And I swear it."

"Coxcomb !"

"And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh ; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for ; you will give me, presently, something I wish for."

"I will ?"

"Yes, you will ; but, at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing, so be at ease."

"You are a frightful man, Malicorne ; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you quench my joy."

"Good ; there is no time lost,—you will rejoice when I am gone."

"Go, then ; and after——"

"So be it ; but, in the first place, a piece of advice."

"What is it ?"

"Resume your good-humor,—you are ugly when you pout."

"Coarse!"

"Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it."

"Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!"

"Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!"

The young man leant with his elbow upon the window-frame;—Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, smoothed down his black doublet;—Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" cried she, furious; "he has assumed his respectful air—and he will pout for a week."

"A fortnight, mademoiselle," said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais lifted up her little doubled fist. "Monster!" said she; "oh! that I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"I would strangle you."

"Ah! very well, then," said Malicorne; "I believe I begin to desire something."

"And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? That I should lose my soul from anger?"

Malicorne was rolling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but, all at once, he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and sealed her mouth with two lips that were very warm, for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in the kiss. Nervous and, apparently, angry, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

"Good!" said Malicorne, philosophically, "that's enough for six weeks. Adieu, mademoiselle, accept my very humble salutation." And he made three steps towards the door.

"Well! no,—you shall not go!" cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. "Stay where you are! I order you!"

"You order me?"

"Yes; am I not mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, without doubt."

"A pretty property! *ma foi!* The soul is silly and the heart dry."

"Beware, Montalais, I know you," said Malicorne; "you are going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well, yes!" said, she, hanging round his neck with childish indolence, rather than with loving abandonment.

"Well, yes! for I must thank you at least."

"And for what?"

"For the commission; is it not my whole future?"

"And mine."

Montalais looked at him.

"It is frightful," said she, "that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not."

"I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris,—you are going there,—*we* are going there."

"And so it was for that motive only you have served me; selfish fellow!"

"What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you."

"Well! in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man."

"Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you." And so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close, that they would have been surprised in the arms of each other, if Montalais had not violently

pushed Malicorne, with his back against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, immediately resounded. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door she was coming in at.

"It is again that good-for-nothing!" cried the old lady. "Always here!"

"Ah, madame!" replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; "it is eight long days since I was here."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH WE AT LENGTH SEE THE TRUE HEROINE OF THIS HISTORY APPEAR.

BEHIND Madame de Saint-Remy stood Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She heard the explosion of maternal anger, and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the chamber trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woeful countenance might have softened or set laughing whoever observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy; he had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne on his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

"And you, mademoiselle; you may be certain I shall inform madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor?"

"Oh, dear mother!" cried Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "for mercy's sake, spare——"

"Hold your tongue, mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy people; that a young maid of honor like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certes, a misfortune great enough: but that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow."

"But in truth," said Montalais, rebelling again, "I do not know under what pretense you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?"

"And that great good-for-nothing, mademoiselle," resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, "is he here to do any good, I ask you?"

"He is neither here for good nor harm, madame; he comes to see me, that is all."

"It is all very well! all very well!" said the old lady. "Her royal highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge."

"At all events, I do not see why," replied Montalais, "it should be forbidden M. Malicorne to have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable."

"Honorable intentions with such a face!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

"I thank you in the name of my face, madame," said Malicorne.

"Come, my daughter, come," continued Madame de Saint-Remy; "we will go and inform madame that at the very moment she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves with flirtations!"

"Oh!" cried both the accused, with one voice.

"A maid of honor! a maid of honor!" cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

"Well! it is there you are mistaken, madame," said Montalais, highly exasperated; "I am no longer a maid of honor, of madame's at least."

"Have you given in your resignation, mademoiselle? That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it."

"I do not give in my resignation, madame; I take another service,—that is all."

"In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe*?" asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

"Please to learn, madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines*; and that instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal."

"Ha, ha! a royal court," said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh; "a royal court! What think you of that, my daughter?"

And she turned round towards Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who, instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliatory eyes.

"I did not say a royal court, madame," replied Montalais; "because Madame Henrietta of England, who is about to become the wife of S. A. R. Monsieur, is not a queen. I said *almost* royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king."

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy more than the last sentence of Montalais.

"What do you say? of Son Altesse Royale Madame Henrietta?" stammered out the old lady.

"I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say."

"As maid of honor!" cried, at the same time, Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière with delight.

"Yes, madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady's head sank down as if the blow had been too severe for her. But, almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary.

"Oh! oh!" said she; "I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and, at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises, and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great credit upon which they reckoned vanish like smoke."

"Oh! madame, the credit of my protector is incontestable, and his promises are as good as deeds."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful protector?"

"Oh! *mon Dieu!* no! it is that gentleman there," said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who, during this scene, had preserved the most imperturbable coolness, and the most comic dignity.

"Monsieur!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, "monsieur is your protector! Is the man whose credit is so powerful, and whose promises are as good as deeds, Monsieur Malicorne!"

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, as her sole reply, she drew the *brevet* from her pocket, and showed it to the old lady.

"Here is the *brevet*," said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate brevet, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to over-

whelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used then, but did not abuse, her triumph. Malicorne was less generous; he assumed noble *poses* in his *fauteuil*, and stretched himself out with a familiarity which, two hours earlier, would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

"Maid of honor to the young madame!" repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

"Yes, madame, and through the protection of M. Malicorne, moreover."

"It is incredible!" repeated the old lady: "is it not incredible, Louise?" But Louise did not reply; she was sitting, thoughtful, almost sad; passing one hand over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

"Well, but, monsieur," said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, "how did you manage to obtain this post?"

"I asked for it, madame."

"Of whom?"

"One of my friends."

"And have you friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their credit?"

"It appears so."

"And may one ask the name of these friends?"

"I did not say I had many friends, madame, I said I had one friend."

"And that friend is called?"

"*Peste!* madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, we do not publish his name in that fashion, in open day, in order that he may be stolen from us."

"You are right, monsieur, to be silent as to that name; for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it."

"At all events," said Montalais, "if the friend does not exist, the *brevet* does, and that cuts short the question."

"Then, I conceive," said Madame de Saint-Remy, with

the gracious smile of a cat who is going to scratch, "when I found monsieur here just now——"

"Well?"

"He brought you the *brevet*."

"Exactly, madame; you have guessed rightly."

"Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper."

"I think so, madame."

"And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, mademoiselle."

"Very wrong, madame; but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these."

"In that case, let us begone, Louise; we have nothing to do but to retire. Well!"

"Madame!" said La Vallière starting, "did you speak?"

"You do not appear to be listening, my child."

"No, madame, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"A thousand things."

"You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?" cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

"And why should I, my dear Aure?" replied the girl, in a voice soft as a flute.

"*Dame!*" resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; "if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed."

"And why should she bear me ill-will, good gracious?"

"It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you."

"Mother! mother!" cried Louise.

"Prettier a hundred times, madame—not of a better family; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will."

"Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?"

"But, madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there."

"But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court——"

"Ah! so much the worse, madame," said Malicorne, "every one for himself in this poor world."

"Malicorne! Malicorne!" said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man:—

"Occupy Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her, or making it up with her; I must speak to Louise." And, at the same time, a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for his future obedience. Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame Saint-Remy, whilst Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm around her neck:—

"What is the matter? Tell *me*. Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?"

"Oh, no!" said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; "on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune."

"Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!"

"Do people never weep except from envy?"

"Oh! yes, I understand; I am going to Paris and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier——"

"Aure!"

"A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois, and who now resides at Paris."

"In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled."

"Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!"

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

"Come, confess," said Montalais.

"What shall I confess?"

"What makes you weep; people don't weep without cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to go to Paris?"

"Alas!" sighed Louise.

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"To remain here alone, in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the delightful habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you. Oh! how I shall be *envuyée*! how quickly I shall die!"

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise breathed another sigh.

"You do not answer me."

"What would you that I should reply?"

"Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"That is to say you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"Little obstinate thing!" said Montalais; "did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But, confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again?"

"I cannot confess that."

"Then you are wrong."

"In what way?"

"Because—— Do you see this *brevet*?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I would have got you a similar one."

"By whose means?"

"Malicorne's."

"Aure, are you telling the truth? Is that possible?"

"Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he surely can for you."

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity of coming to a

conclusion with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round :—

“What is the question, mademoiselle?”

“Come hither, Malicorne,” said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

“A *brevet* like this,” said Montalais.

“How so?”

“A *brevet* like this; that is plain enough.”

“But——”

“I want one—I must have one!”

“Oh! oh! you must have one!”

“Yes.”

“It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?” said Louise, with her sweet soft voice.

“If it is for *you*, mademoiselle——”

“For me. Yes, Monsieur Malicorne, it *would* be for me.”

“And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time——”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she requires it.”

“Well! we will endeavor to obey you, mademoiselle.”

“And you will have her named?”

“We will try.”

“No evasive answers, Louise de la Vallière shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week.”

“How you talk!”

“Within a week, or else——”

“Well! or else?”

“You may take back your *brevet*, Monsieur Malicorne; I will not leave my friend.”

“Dear Montalais!”

“That is right. Keep your *brevet*; Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be a maid of honor.”

“Is that true?”

"Quite true."

"I may then hope to go to Paris?"

"Depend upon it."

"Oh! Monsieur Malicorne, what joy!" cried Louise, clapping her hands, and bounding with pleasure.

"Little dissembler!" said Montalais, "try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul."

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, she ran and embraced her mother. "Madame," said she, "do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?"

"M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise," replied the old lady, "he is all-powerful, seemingly."

"Should you also like to be maid of honor?" asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. "Whilst I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed."

And upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted.

"Humph!" murmured Malicorne as he descended the stairs,— "Humph! there goes another note of a thousand livres! but I must get through as well as I can; my friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MALICORNE AND MANICAMP.

THE introduction of these two new personages into this history and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of both historian and reader. We will then enter into some details concerning Messieurs Malicorne and Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the

brevet destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a strong feeling at the castle of Blois. At that moment, M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular personage was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had, as the companion of his boyhood, this de Manicamp, a poor gentleman, vassal-born, of the house of Grammont. M. de Manicamp, with his tact and talent, had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated maréchal. From his infancy he had, with calculation beyond his age, lent his name and complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Maréchale, if he had broken a mirror, or put out a dog's eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling on the innocent. But this was the way this system of abnegation was paid for: instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year. It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the obstinacy which banish from man every sentiment of the supernatural. His sole ambition was to spend money. But, in this respect, the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year he drained the Comte de Guiche, and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, when he declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his

energy, he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing and sold his handsome clothes, under the pretense that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength, the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of De Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. This mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth, had rendered our hero sufficiently celebrated in Orleans, a city where, in general, we should be puzzled to say why he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial *débarchés*, *petits-maîtres* of six hundred livres a year, shared the fragments of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. de Condé, always needy as a De Condé, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest; that is to say, that in those times of easy morals, he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having two thousand four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite contrary to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition: he spent money out of ambition: and he would have ruined himself for ambition. Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost, and for this, at whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had

little or no friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur, the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per an.* :—Ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres. De Manicamp cost—money lent, never returned—from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per an.* So that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah! yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffers of the syndic, half a dozen years' profits, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself—observe, quite to himself—to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household would be established at the period of his marriage. This juncture had arrived, and the household was about to be established. A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the credit, and on the recommendation of a friend, like the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per an.*; and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a half noble family, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But, in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, should be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess, as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous. And in order that the wife should not be of one party whilst the husband belonged to the other,

a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts—Malicorne had imagined the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur, the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain the plan was formed by a clear head ; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask a *brevet* of maid of honor of the Comte de Guiche ; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this *brevet* of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The constructive plan of Malicorne—for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present, but extended to the future—the constructive plan of Malicorne, we say, was this :—To obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing ; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household ; whilst he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp, should, between them, know all the male secrets of the young community. It was by these means that a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired at one and the same time. Malicorne was a vile name ; he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself ; but an estate might be purchased ; and Malicorne of some place, or even De Malicorne itself, for short, would ring more nobly on the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be hunted up by the heralds for this name of Malicorne ; might it not come from some estate where a bull with mortal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt ? Certes, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties : but

the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, close, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers, or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had exhausted Malicorne's patience for a month.

Love apart, Malicorne was happy; but this love, which he could not help feeling, he had the strength to conceal with care; persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean female, the demon would overthrow him and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire, when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms, she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed she did not love Malicorne; whilst, on the contrary, in reality she did. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestation of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him; and then she believed she detested Malicorne. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played the coquette better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne in an indissoluble fashion, was that Malicorne always came cram full of fresh news from the court and the city; Malicorne always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume; that Malicorne never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means, Malicorne learnt all that passed at Blois, in the family of the dowager Madame; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter, out of idleness, took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in two words, was the woof of petty interests

and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Paris; and which was about to bring into the last named city, where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne—we speak of the syndic of Orleans—he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future; and had no suspicion as he walked, every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Sainte-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII. and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he who was paying for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all those little keepsakes, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MANICAMP AND MALICORNE.

MALICORNE, then, left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had, to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the *brevet* obtained for Montalais. He had then no ex-

pectation of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left,—as we have been forced to confess to the reader—Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money, nothing but sleep to take the place of repasts, companies and balls. It has been said—“He who sleeps, dines ;” but it has never been affirmed—He who sleeps, plays—or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing, for a week at least, was, consequently, very sad ; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

“Eh! what!” said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, “is that you again, dear friend?”

“Humph! you are very polite!” said Malicorne.

“Ay, but look you, I was expecting money, and, instead of money, I see *you*.”

“And suppose I brought you some money?”

“Oh! that would be quite another thing. You are very welcome, my dear friend!”

And he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for the purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

“And the money?” said Manicamp.

“My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it.”

“What must be done for it?”

“Earn it, *parbleu!*”

“And after what fashion?”

“Oh! that is rather trying, I warn you.”

“The devil!”

“You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche.”

"I get up!" said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed, complacently, "oh, no, thank you!"

"You have sold all your clothes?"

"No, I have one suit left, the handsomest even, but I expect a purchaser."

"And the *chausses*?"

"Well, if you look, you will see them on that chair."

"Very well! since you have some *chausses* and a *pourpoint* left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other; have a horse saddled, and set off."

"Not I."

"And why not?"

"*Morbleu!* don't you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Etampes?"

"No, I thought he was at Paris. You will then only have fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty."

"You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and, instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen."

"Sell them for what you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor."

"Good! for whom? Is Montalais doubled then?"

"Vile fellow! It is you who are doubled. You swallow up two fortunes—mine, and that of M. le Comte de Guiche."

"You should say that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours."

"That is true; honor where it is due; but I return to my *brevet*."

"And you are wrong."

"Prove me that."

"My friend, there will only be twelve maids of honor for madame; I have already obtained for you what

twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ all my diplomacy."

"Oh! yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend."

"We know what we are about," said Manicamp.

"To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing."

"What? To call yourself Malicorne the first?"

"No; to make you superintendent of my finances; but that is not the question now."

"Unfortunately."

"The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor."

"My friend, if you were to promise me the price of heaven, I would decline to disturb myself at this moment." Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket.

"There are twenty pistoles here," said Malicorne.

"And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*"

"Well!" said Malicorne, a little angrily, "suppose I were to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?"

"You are right," replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, "and from that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me."

"An instant, what the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my *brevet*?"

"To be sure you shall."

"Soon?"

"To-day."

"Oh! take care! Monsieur de Manicamp; you undertake much, and I do not ask that. Thirty leagues in a day is too much, you would kill yourself."

"I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend."

"You are quite heroic."

"Where are the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," said Malicorne, showing them.

"That's well."

"Yes, but my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in post-horses alone!"

"No, no, make yourself easy on that score."

"Pardon me. Why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Etampes?"

"Fourteen."

"Well! fourteen be it; fourteen leagues make seven posts; at twenty *sous* the post, seven *livres*; seven *livres* the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight! as much for bed and supper, that makes sixty *livres* this complaisance would cost."

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, "You are right," said he; "I could not return before to-morrow;" and he took the twenty pistoles.

"Now, then, be off!"

"Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time."

"Time for what?"

"Time to play."

"What do you wish to play with?"

"Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*"

"No; you always win."

"I will wager them, then."

"Against what?"

"Against twenty others."

"And what shall be the object of the wager?"

"This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Etampes?"

"Yes."

"And fourteen leagues back?"

"Doubtless."

"Well; for these twenty-eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?"

"That is agreed."

"One hour to find the Comte de Guiche."

"Go on."

"And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to monsieur."

"Just so."

"Sixteen hours in all?"

"You reckon as well as M. Colbert."

"It is now twelve o'clock."

"Half-past."

"*Hein!*—you have a handsome watch!"

"What were you saying?" said Malicorne, putting his watch quickly back into his fob.

"Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche's letter in——"

"How soon?"

"In eight hours."

"Have you a winged horse, then?"

"That is no matter. Will you bet?"

"I shall have the Comte's letter in eight hours?"

"Yes."

"In hand?"

"In hand."

"Well, be it so; I lay," said Malicorne, curious to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

"Is it agreed?"

"It is."

"Pass me the pen, ink, and paper."

"Here they are."

"Thank you."

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on

his left elbow, in his best hand, traced the following lines :—

“Good for an order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. le Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight.

“DE MANICAMP.”

This painful task accomplished, he laid himself down in bed again.

“Well!” asked Malicorne, “what does this mean?”

“That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager.”

“How the devil is that?”

“That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper.”

“Well?”

“And you set out instead of me.”

“Ah!”

“You put your horses to their best speed.”

“Good!”

“In six hours you will be at Etampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the comte, and I shall have won my wager without stirring from my bed, which suits me and you too, at the same time, I am very sure.”

“Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man.”

“*Hein!* I know that.”

“I am to start then for Etampes?”

“Directly.”

“I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?”

“He will give you a similar one for Monsieur.”

“Monsieur will approve?”

“Instantly.”

“And I shall have my *brevet*?”

“You will.”

"Ah!"

"Well, I hope I behave genteelly?"

"Adorably."

"Thank you."

"You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, Malicorne?"

"Except making money of him—everything?"

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask——"

"What?"

"Something important."

"What do you call important?"

"Well! suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?"

"I would not render it to him."

"Selfish fellow!"

"Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange."

"Ah! that, perhaps, is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you."

"What, you, Malicorne?"

"Yes; I."

"Ah! ah! you are rich, then?"

"I have still fifty pistoles left."

"Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?"

"Here," said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Then speak, my friend; what do you want?"

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. "Write!" said he.

"Dictate!"

"An order for a place in the household of Monsieur."

"Oh!" said Manicamp, laying down the pen, "a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?"

"You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear plainly."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said five hundred."

"And the five hundred?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the rouleau with his eyes ; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance.

"Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles."

"I say it is for nothing, my friend," said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, "and you exhaust my credit. Dictate."

Malicorne continued :

"Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain for my friend Malicorne."

"That's it," said Manicamp.

"Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?"

"Here are two hundred and fifty of them."

"And the other two hundred and fifty?"

"When I am in possession of my place."

Manicamp made a face.

"In that case give me the recommendation back again."

"What to do?"

"To add two words to it."

"Two words?"

"Yes; two words only."

"What are they?"

"In haste."

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

"Good," said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count out the pistoles.

"There want twenty," said he.

"How so?"

"The twenty I have won."

"In what way?"

"By laying that you would have the letter from the Comte De Guiche in eight hours."

"Ah! that's fair," and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to scoop up his gold by handfuls, and pour it in cascades upon his bed.

"This second place," murmured Malicorne, whilst drying his paper, "which, at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first, but——" He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais:—

"MADEMOISELLE,—Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long before it arrives; I am setting out to get it signed: that will be twenty-eight leagues I shall have gone for the love of you."

Then with his sardonic smile, taking up the interrupted sentence:—"This place," said he, "at the first glance, appears to cost more than the first; but—the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion with the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else,—or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp," and he left the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COURTYARD OF THE HÔTEL GRAMMONT.

ON Malicorne's arrival at Orleans, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. Malicorne rested himself for a couple of hours, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel, where, in his previous journeys to the capital, he had been accustomed

to put up, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hôtel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time, for the Count de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Havre, where the principal members of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hôtel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his tradespeople and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness that were being submitted to him; when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed: "let him enter by all means." And he advanced a few steps toward the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face he did not recognize, instead of the one he expected, said: "Forgive me, monsieur le comte, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Guiche, coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

"A letter, monsieur le comte." Malicorne handed him the first document, and narrowly watched the count's face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?"

Malicorne bowed. "Why does he not come himself?" he inquired.

"He is confined to his bed."

"The deuce! he has no money then, I suppose," said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. "What does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a movement, to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself. "Why does he not make use of his credit, then?" continued De Guiche.

"With regard to that, I think——"

"What?"

"That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, monsieur le comte."

"He will not be at Havre, then?" Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

"But every one will be there."

"I trust, monsieur le comte, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity."

"He should be at Paris by this time."

"He will take the direct road perhaps to make up for lost time."

"Where is he now?"

"At Orleans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, "you seem to me a man of very good taste."

Malicorne was wearing some of Manicamp's old-new clothes. He bowed in return, saying, "You do me a very great honor, monsieur le comte."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was a man of great readiness, and immediately understood the position of affairs. Besides, the "de" which had been prefixed to his name, raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing.

He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur, and said, without hesitation: "Somewhat heavy, monsieur."

"You see," said De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who understands these matters well, thinks the holsters heavy, a complaint I had already made." The saddler was full of excuses.

"What do you think," asked de Guiche, "of this horse, which I have just purchased?"

"To look at it, it seems perfect, monsieur le comte; but I must mount it before I give you my opinion."

"Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times."

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged, that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the bridle and snaffle-reins, placed his left hand on the horse's mane, and, with his foot in the stirrup, raised himself and seated himself in the saddle. At first, he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the courtyard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by. "Well," said the count, "what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, monsieur le comte, is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a horse intended for a charger should commence. The fore-hand is light. A horse which holds its head high, it is said, never tires his rider's hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tract-

able ; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the comte ; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive ;" then, turning towards him again, he continued, "you are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, monsieur le comte ; my clothes were made at Paris.

"There is no doubt about that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, monsieur le comte."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face as he answered hurriedly.

"A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah, ah ! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then ; a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already fitting, but to whom the word "affianced," addressed by Malicorne with respect to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second appointment destined?" asked De Guiche ; "is it for any one to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced ? In that case I pity her, poor girl ! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband."

"No, monsieur le comte ; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière."

"Unknown," said De Guiche.

"Unknown ? yes, monsieur," said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

"Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?"

"She belongs to a very good family, and is maid of honor to Madame."

"That's well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?"

"Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor."

"Have you your carriage?"

"No; I came here on horseback."

"Dressed as you are?"

"No, monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and I changed my traveling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you."

"True, you already told me you had come from Orleans;" saying which he crumpled Manicamp's letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

"I beg your pardon," said Malicorne, timidly; "but I do not think you have read all."

"Not read all, do you say?"

"No; there were two letters in the same envelope."

"Oh! are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Let us look, then," said the count, as he opened the letter again.

"Ah! you are right," he said, opening the paper which he had not yet read.

"I suspected it," he continued—"another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a regular vampire:—he is carrying on a trade in it."

"No, monsieur le comte, he wishes to make a present of it."

"To whom?"

"To myself, monsieur."

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. Mauvaisecorne?"

"Malicorne, monsieur le comte."

"Forgive me; it is the Latin that bothers me—that terrible mine of etymologies. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise*—you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne."

"Your kindness affects me much, monsieur: but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay."

"What is it?"

"That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability; but my name is Malicorne simply."

"You appear to me, monsieur!" exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, "to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M. Malicorne, and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp. Be candid and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth."

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king's household?"

"I beg your pardon, count; but, if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me."

"Besides, he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it;—there is a Malicorne at Orleans, who lends money to the prince."

"I think that must be my father, monsieur."

"Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible dragon of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, monsieur; I know him. He will fleece you completely."

"The only difference is, that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, smiling.

"I was correct in saying you were either a saint or very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name."

"Ah! monsieur le comte, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you?" said Malicorne, transported.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne." And De Guiche proceeded toward the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him. At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, bright eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows. "Good-day," he said, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

"Is that you, De Wardes?—What! and booted, spurred and whip in hand, too?"

"The most befitting costume for a man about to set off for Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow." And hereupon he saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince.

"M. Malicorne," said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

"M. de Wardes," said Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. "By the by, De Wardes," continued De Guiche, "you who are so well acquainted with these matters, can you tell us, probably, what appointments are still vacant at the court; or rather in the prince's household?"

"In the prince's household," said De Wardes, looking up with an air of consideration, "let me see—the appointment of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe."

"Oh," said Malicorne, "there is no question of such a post as that, monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted."

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and fathomed Malicorne immediately. "The

fact is," he said, looking at him from head to foot, "a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post."

"All I solicit," said Malicorne, "is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position."

"M. Malicorne, whom you see here," said De Guiche to De Wardes, "is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. As far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have but gentle birth to boast of."

"Assuredly," said De Wardes; "but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal highness's household."

"You are right," said the count, "court etiquette is absolute. The devil!—we never so much as gave it a thought."

"Alas! a sad misfortune for me, monsieur le comte," said Malicorne, changing color.

"Yet not without remedy, I hope," returned De Guiche.

"The remedy is found easily enough," exclaimed De Wardes; you can be created a gentleman. His Eminence the Cardinal Mazarin did nothing else from morning till night."

"Hush, hush, De Wardes," said the count; "no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it."

"Upon my word, De Guiche, you're quite a Puritan, as the English say."

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a room.

"Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on his perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. "I have come, De Guiche," he said, "to ask your companionship. We set off for Havre, I presume."

"This is admirable—delightful. We shall have a most enjoyable journey. M. Malicorne, M. Bragelonne—ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you." The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their very natures seemed, from the beginning, disposed to take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, full of dissimulation; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. "Decide between us—between De Wardes and myself, Raoul."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of noble birth."

"Who can be better informed on that subject than a De Grammont?"

"No compliments; it is your opinion I ask."

"At least, inform me of the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless to the man on whom it is bestowed."

"And you are correct," said Bragelonne, quietly.

"But, monsieur le vicomte," interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, "I affirm that it is I who am correct."

"What was your opinion, monsieur?"

"I was saying that everything is done in France at the present moment, to humiliate men of family."

"And by whom?"

"By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings."

"Nonsense," said De Guiche; "where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?"

"One example will suffice," he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

"State it then."

"Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the musketeers—an appointment more valuable than a peerage; for it gives precedence over all the *maréchals* of France?"

Raoul's color mounted in his face; for he saw the object De Wardes had in view. "No; who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant eight days ago; a proof of which is, that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *protégés*."

"Well, the king refused it to Monsieur's *protégé*, in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the antechambers during the last thirty years."

"Forgive me if I interrupt you," said Raoul, darting a glance full of severity at De Wardes: "but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking."

"I not acquainted with M. d'Artagnan? Can you tell me, monsieur, who does *not* know him?"

"Those who *do* know him, monsieur," replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, "are in the habit of saying, that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king—which is not his fault—he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty."

Such is my opinion, monsieur; and I thank heaven I have known M. d'Artagnan from my birth."

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME.

THE discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter, for there was in Bragelonne's face a look instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one of them, and perhaps by both. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must take our leave of each other, I must pay a visit to Monsieur. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure."

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. "That is well," said De Guiche, "remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased; you will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fère." While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order

to perceive what effect the name of Raoul's father would produce upon him. "I thank you," answered the young man, "the count is very well." A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes' eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the foreboding expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand, said,—“It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal?” He then signed to De Wardes to follow him who had been engaged in balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other. “We are going,” said he, “come, M. Malicorne.” This name made Raoul start; for it seemed that he had already heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to recall it half-dreamily, yet half-irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men set out on their way towards the Palais-Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things; the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them; and therefore he walked behind. “Are you mad?” said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hôtel de Grammont; “you attack M. d’Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul.”

“Well,” said De Wardes, “what then?”

“What do you mean by ‘what then?’”

“Certainly, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d’Artagnan?”

“But you know very well that M. d’Artagnan was one of those celebrated and terrible four men who were called the musketeers.”

“That they may be: but I do not perceive why, on that account, I should be forbidden to hate M. d’Artagnan.”

“What cause has he given you?”

“Me! personally, none.”

"Why hate him, therefore?"

"Ask my dead father that question."

"Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d'Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any *enmity* he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, on his side, carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they cannot be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given."

"Listen to me, my dear De Guiche, this inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan, and when I was quite a child, he acquainted me with the reason for it, and, as forming part of my inheritance, I regard it as a particular legacy bestowed upon me."

"And does this hatred concern M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"As for that, M. d'Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred falls to their lot, and that hatred is of such a nature, whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their allowance."

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind; he knew that the time had passed away for *grands coups entre gentilshommes*; but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the mind, instead of being diffused abroad, was still hatred all the same; that a smile was sometimes as full of meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their arms, would now succeed the sons, who would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer combat their enemies, save by means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled. However, while these

gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed the entire mastery over himself.

"At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not know him even."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of severity in his tone of voice, "do not forget one circumstance, that Raoul is my most intimate friend;" a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out his secret from him; but, doubtless, De Wardes had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul. In the mean time they had reached the Palais-Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. The household belonging to Monsieur awaited his command to mount their horses, in order to form part of the escort of the ambassadors, to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris. The brilliant display of horses, arms, and rich liveries, afforded some compensation in those times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people, and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said: "Let them sing, provided they pay;" while Louis XIV.'s remark was, "Let them look." Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look, but they were no longer allowed to sing. De Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the bottom of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor and good graces of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately, though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince's apartments, whom he found engaged in admiring himself in the glass, and rouging his face. In a corner of the cabinet, the

Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long hair curled, with which he was playing in the same manner a woman would have done. The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: "Ah! is that you, Guiche; come here and tell me the truth."

"You know, my lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth."

"You will hardly believe, De Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, he pretends," continued the prince, "that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man."

"Do not forget, my lord," said De Guiche, frowning slightly, "you require me to speak the truth?"

"Certainly," said the prince, tremblingly.

"Well, and I shall tell it you."

"Do not be in a hurry, Guiche," exclaimed the prince, "you have plenty of time; look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, her portrait is here. Look at it." And he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution. De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively.

"Upon my honor, my lord, this is indeed a most lovely face."

"But look at me, count, look at *me*," said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

"It is wonderful," murmured Guiche.

"Really, one would almost imagine you had never seen the young lady before."

"It is true, my lord, I have seen her, but it was five years ago; there is a great difference between a child twelve years old and a girl of seventeen."

"Well, what is your opinion."

"My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering my lord."

"Of that," said the prince triumphantly, "there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not, what would your opinion be?"

"My lord, that your highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride."

"Very well, that is your opinion of her, but of me?"

"My opinion, my lord, is that you are too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, "My friends are not over indulgent." De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and, after lengthened contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness, saying, "Most decidedly, my lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your highness, than to look at Madame once again. It seemed as if the chevalier had detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed: "Very well, get married yourself." Monsieur continued painting himself, and when he had finished, looked at the portrait again once more turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. "You are very kind to have come," he said to Guiche, "I feared you would leave without bidding me adieu."

"Your highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect."

"Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?"

"Your highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make."

"Very good, what is it?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately displayed the greatest attention, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And, as Guiche hesitated, the prince said: "If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am in funds; the superintendent of the finances has sent me 500,000 pistoles."

"I thank your highness; but it is not an affair of money."

"What is it, then? Tell me."

"The appointment of a maid of honor."

"Oh! oh! Guiche, what a protector you have become of young ladies," said the prince, "you never speak of any one else now."

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. "My lord," said the Comte, "it is not I who am directly interested in the lady of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends."

"Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is interested?"

"Mlle. de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess."

"Why, she is lame," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

"Lame," repeated the prince, "and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes? Most certainly not, may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition,"

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

"Chevalier," said Guiche, "your conduct is ungenerous; while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can."

"Forgive me, comte," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which Guiche had made his remark, "but I had no intention of doing so, and I be-

gin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another."

"There is no doubt of it, monsieur; and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case."

"Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?" inquired the prince.

"I do, my lord."

"Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chevalier, "midday already, that is the hour fixed for the departure."

"You dismiss me, monsieur?" inquired Guiche.

"Really, count, you treat me very ill to-day," replied the chevalier.

"For heaven's sake, count, for heaven's sake, chevalier," said Monsieur, "do you not see how you are distressing me."

"Your highness's signature?" said Guiche.

"Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give it to me." Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. "Here," he said returning him the appointment, "but I give it on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you make friends with the chevalier."

"Willingly," said Guiche. And he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

"Adieu, count," said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed the count's slight; "adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not talk with her own portrait too much."

"Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who accompany you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Both excellent and fearless companions."

"Too fearless," said the chevalier; "endeavor to bring them both back, count."

"A bad heart, bad!" murmured De Guiche; "he scents mischief everywhere, and sooner than anything else." And taking leave of the prince, he quitted the apartment. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it, trembling with delight. When, however, he held it in his hand, Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

"Patience, monsieur," he said; "the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu."

"Adieu, monsieur le comte; a thousand thanks," said Malicorne.

"Send Manicamp to me. By the way, monsieur, is it true that Mlle. de la Vallière is lame?" As he said this a horse drew up behind him, and on turning round he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which, however, was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count's voice.

"Why is Louise's name spoken of here," said Raoul to himself; "oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence."

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, "prepare to start."

At this moment the prince, who had completed his toilette, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of all who composed the escort, and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and feathers were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HAVRE.

THIS brilliant and animated company, the members of which were inspired by various feelings, arrived at Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of this disorder, the Comte de Guiche fancied he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet, trimmed with silver. Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in his violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set in a blaze, rather than illuminated, the gate by which Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp's face, could not resist laughing. "Well, my poor Manicamp," he exclaimed, "how violet you look; are you in mourning?"

"Yes," replied Manicamp; "I am in mourning."

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue-and-gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this;

and I was even obliged to economize, from compulsion, in order to get possession of it."

"Indeed?"

"It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money."

"At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing."

"By the most horrible roads."

"Where are you lodging?"

"Lodging?"

"Yes!"

"I am not lodging anywhere."

De Guiche began to laugh. "Well," said he, "where do you intend to lodge?"

"In the same place you do."

"But I don't know, myself."

"What do you mean by saying you don't know?"

"Certainly, how is it likely I should know where I should stay."

"Have you not retained an hotel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you or the prince."

"Neither of us has thought of it. Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter——"

"Certainly, there are some very excellent houses."

"Well then——"

"But not for us."

"What do you mean by saying not for us?—for whom, then?"

"For the English, of course."

"For the English?"

"Yes; the houses are all taken."

"By whom?"

"By the Duke of Buckingham."

"I beg your pardon?" said Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

"Yes, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace was preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately retained all the houses fit for habitation the town possesses."

"Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other."

"Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me."

"But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Havre?"

"He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet arrived; but, once disembarked, he will occupy it."

"Oh! oh!"

"It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything."

"That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house, is satisfied with it, and does not require two."

"Yes, but two men?"

"Be it so: for two men, two houses, or four or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Havre."

"Yes, and all the hundred are let."

"Impossible!"

"What an obstinate fellow you are. I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which the queen dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit."

"He is singular enough, indeed," said De Wardes, caressing his horse's neck.

"Such is the case, however, monsieur."

"You are quite sure of it, Monsieur de Manicamp!" and as he put this question, he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to interrogate him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend's state of mind. During this

discussion the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages, blocked up the gate and the open place; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be noticed groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle. Amidst all this hesitation of purpose, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected on the water, inhaling with rapture the sea breezes, and listening to the waves which noisily broke upon the shore and on the beach, tossing the spray into the air with a noise that echoed in the distance. "But," exclaimed De Guiche, "what is Buckingham's motive for providing such a supply of lodgings?"

"Yes, yes," said De Wardes; "what reason has he?"

"A very excellent one," replied Manicamp.

"You know what it is, then?"

"I fancy I do."

"Tell us, then."

"Bend your head down towards me."

"What! may it not be spoken except in private?"

"You shall judge of that yourself."

"Very well." De Guiche bent down.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I do not understand you at all."

"Say rather, you cannot understand me *yet*."

"Explain yourself."

"Very well; it is quite certain, count, that his royal highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands."

"What do you mean?"

"The Duke of Buckingham——"

"It is a name of ill omen to princes of the house of France."

"And so the duke is madly in love with Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself."

De Guiche colored. "Thank you, thank you," said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, added, "Whatever you do, Manicamp, be careful that this project of Buckingham's is not made known to any Frenchman here; for, if so, many a sword would be unsheathed in this country that does not fear English steel."

"But after all," said Manicamp, "I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale."

"No, no," said De Guiche, "it must be the truth;" and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

"Well," said Manicamp, "after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the princess."

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"It is a fact, or at least, everybody says so."

"Silence!" cried the count.

"But why, silence?" said De Wardes; "it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, Monsieur de Bragelonne?"

"To what circumstance do you allude?" inquired De Bragelonne with an abstracted air.

"That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses."

"Forgive me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining."

"There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris in order that his majesty, King Louis XIII., should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French court; and it

seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a princess who has French blood in her veins. The fact of having inspired a passion on the other side of the Channel will henceforth confer a title to beauty on this."

"Sir," replied De Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen like ourselves should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?"

"How am I to understand that?" said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark.

"In any way you choose, monsieur," replied De Bragelonne, coldly.

"Bragelonne, Bragelonne," murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes," exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong."

"Wrong; in what way, may I ask?"

"You are wrong, monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of some one or something," replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

"Be indulgent, Raoul," said De Guiche, in an undertone.

"Pray do not think of fighting, gentlemen!" said Manicamp, "before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much."

"Come," said De Guiche, "forward, gentlemen!" and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself towards the center of the square, through the crowd, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway looking out upon a courtyard was open;

Guiche entered the courtyard, and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen, followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appearing to Manicamp rather premature, he proposed instead that they should first rest themselves. This was the wisest thing to do, but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things were wanting; namely, a house and beds. De Guiche reflected for awhile, and then said aloud, "Let him who loves me, follow me!"

"The attendants also?" inquired a page who had approached the group.

"Every one," exclaimed the impetuous young man. "Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her Royal Highness's residence."

Without in any way divining the count's project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of that project with which they were yet unacquainted. The wind was blowing strongly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT SEA.

THE following day was somewhat calmer, although the gale still continued. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of orange clouds, tingeing with its cheerful rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently

kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signaled as in view; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a skillful archer; and yet the sea ran so high that their speed was as nothing compared to the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the line of the ships, and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The whole French court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered by crowds of people. Two hours afterwards, the other vessels had overtaken the flagship, and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Havre and La Hève. When the maneuver had been completed, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France by twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, discharge for discharge, from Fort Francis the First. Immediately afterwards a hundred boats were launched,—they were covered with the richest stuffs, and destined for the conveyance of the different members of the French nobility towards the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the shore with a terrible uproar, it will readily be believed that not one of those frail boats would be able with safety to reach a fourth part of the distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor for the purpose of placing itself at the admiral's disposal.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceived the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: "Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men, as we are, ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute strength of wind and waves?"

"That is precisely the very reflection I was silently making to myself," replied Bragelonne.

"Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?"

"Take care, or you will get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And for no purpose," said De Wardes, "for with the wind in your teeth, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels."

"You refuse, then?"

"Assuredly I do; I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter against men," he said, glancing at Bragelonne, "but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that?"

"And for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent to the loss of the only good dress which I have left,—salt water would spoil it."

"You, then, refuse also?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly."

"But," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes—look Manicamp—look yonder, the princesses are looking at us from the poop of the admiral's vessel."

"An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by being drowned while they are looking on."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"And then yours, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I go alone."

"Not so," said Raoul, "for I shall accompany you; I thought it was understood I should do so."

The fact is, that Raoul, uninfluenced by devotion, measuring the risk they run, saw how imminent the danger was, but he willingly allowed himself to accept a peril which De Wardes had declined.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. "Stay," said he: "we want two places in your boat;" and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper, he threw them from the quay into the boat.

"It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen."

"We are afraid of nothing," replied De Guiche.

"Come along, then."

The pilot approached the side of the boat, and the two young men, one after the other, with equal vivacity, jumped into the boat. "Courage, my men," said De Guiche; "I have twenty pistoles left in this purse, and as soon as we reach the admiral's vessel they shall be yours." The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves. The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Havre hurried towards the jetties and every look was directed towards the little bark; at one moment it flew suspended on the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downwards towards the bottom of a raging abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. At the expiration of an hour's struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral's vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been dispatched towards their aid. Upon the quarter-deck of the flagship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which

was suspended by stout supports, Henrietta, the queen-dowager, and the young princess—with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them—watched with alarm this slender bark, at one moment tossed to the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, and against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel by a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, who resumed his place near them, they approached to offer their homage to the princesses. Respect, and yet more, a certain, apprehension, for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from looking at Madame attentively, who, however, had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, “Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?” Madame Henrietta, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, “No ; it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite.” The princess, at this reply, was constrained to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened. At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had, at last, summoned courage to raise his eyes towards her and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her pale face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful nut-brown hair, her expressive lips, and her every gesture, which,

while betokening royal descent, seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was, for a moment, so overcome, that, had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leant, he would have fallen. His friend's amazed look, and the encouraging gesture of the queen, restored Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, explained in what way he had become the envoy of his royal highness; and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and several of the English noblemen who were grouped around the princesses.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received; the share that the Comte de la Fère had had in the restoration of Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the comte who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage, by means of which the grand-daughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend's interpreter with the young English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language. At this moment a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, and whose dress and arms were remarkable for their extravagance of material. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and, in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, "It is time now to disembark, your Royal Highness." The younger of the princesses rose from her seat at this remark, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman extended to her, with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral intervened between them, observing: "A moment, if you please, my lord; it is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; it is probable the wind may abate before sun-

set, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening."

"Allow me to observe, my lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise, "you detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, unhappily, now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;" and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and Guiche, whom he saluted.

"I cannot suppose that these gentlemen intend to expose the lives of their Royal Highnesses," replied the admiral.

"These gentlemen," retorted Buckingham, "arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for their Royal Highnesses when the wind will be in their favor."

"These envoys have shown how great their courage is," said the admiral. "You may have observed that there was a great number of persons on shore who did *not* venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to show their respect with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother, induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to-day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies."

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous; he seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme. "In that case," returned Buckingham. "I appeal to Madame herself."

"And I, my lord," retorted the admiral, "I appeal to

my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise."

"But, sir——" continued Buckingham.

"My lord, permit me to remind you that I command here."

"Are you aware what you are saying, my lord?" replied Buckingham, haughtily.

"Perfectly so; I therefore repeat it: I alone command here, all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too." This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled with anger from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the tent to prevent himself falling; his eyes became suffused with blood, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

"My lord," said the queen, permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the Duke of Norfolk; if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and propitious, we can still afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however half-concealed beneath the thick curtains of the velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the discussion, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh misfortune for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast of the ship.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French, "and that may possibly be his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man overheard this remark, turned suddenly pale, and, letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, drew aside, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of the duke's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner had been served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness to see himself banished by etiquette from the presence of his sovereign, to a position inferior to that which, by rank, he was entitled to. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness, than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of mingled regret and happiness to pass through his whole frame. The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my lord, from this moment," said he, "not to interpose between her royal highness and myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal highness belongs to France, and when she deigns to honor me by touching my hand, it is the hand of Monsieur, the brother of the king of France, she touches."

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked deference, and at the same time, with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, whilst a groan of despair

escaped from Buckingham's lips. Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a bosom friend or mother can alone extend, either as protector or guardian, over the one who is about to stray from the right path. Towards two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth anew, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog, which had shrouded the coast, disappeared like a veil withdrawn from before it. The smiling hills of France appeared in full view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TENTS.

THE admiral, as we have seen, was determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they quitted England, he had gradually accustomed himself to his behavior. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt, instinctively, that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and, as she discerned its danger, was prepared to meet it, whenever the proper moment should arrive. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart; he, in his impatience, addressed himself to the princess, in a low tone of voice: "For Heaven's sake, madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation.

Do you not perceive how that insolent Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark; she smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach, and languid impertinence, which women and princesses so well know how to assume, she murmured, "I have already hinted, my lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail escaped Raoul's attention; he heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he remarked Buckingham retire, heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass his hand across his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the last orders for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an exhibition of delight that a stranger would really imagine the young man's reason was affected. As the Duke of Norfolk gave his commands, a large boat or barge, decked with flags, and capable of holding about twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. The barge was carpeted with velvet and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England, and with garlands of flowers; for, at that time, ornamentation was by no means forgotten in these political pageants. No sooner was this really royal boat afloat, and the rowers with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess, than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder in order to take his place. His progress was, however, arrested by the queen. "My lord," she said, "it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly

prepared. I beg your lordship to be good enough to precede us ashore, and to give directions that everything be in proper order on our arrival."

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and, still more so, since it was so unexpected. He hesitated, colored violently, but could not reply. He had thought he might be able to keep near Madame during the passage to the shore, and, by this means, to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, "Launch the ship's gig." His directions were executed with that celerity which distinguishes every maneuver on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him. The queen-mother rose, and with a tone of authority, said, "Pray set off, sir."

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half-choked by contending emotions, said, "And you, gentlemen, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?"

De Guiche bowed and said, "Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her majesty's orders; whatever the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them." Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

"Your grace will remember," said the queen, "that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England; his presence cannot be dispensed with; be-

sides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such a terrible stress of weather."

Buckingham opened his lips, as if he were about to speak, but, whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable escaped them, and turning away, as though out of his mind, he leapt from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him to steady themselves; for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

"His grace cannot be in his senses," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am uneasy on the Duke's account," replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was advancing towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed upon the admiral's ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or a mother separated from her child, about to be led away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his frowns, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind, he sank down in the boat, burying his hands in his hair, whilst the boat, impelled by the exertions of the merry sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy, that, had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him, he would hardly have had strength to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up, like Achilles in his tent. The barge bearing the princesses quitted the admiral's vessel at the very moment Buckingham landed. It was followed by another boat filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. Great numbers of the inhabitants of Havre, having embarked in fishing-cobles, and boats of every description, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which

were returned by the flag-ship and the two other vessels, and the flashes from the open mouths of the cannon floated in white fumes over the waves, and disappeared in the clear blue sky.

The princess landed at the decorated quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied her every step she took. During the time she was passing through the center of the town, and treading beneath her delicate feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers, which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hurried through the town and hastened rapidly towards the place intended for the residence of Madame.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche, "for, if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance, when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear," said De Guiche, "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself, while Manicamp is the very personification of artless gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterwards they were within sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of people assembled in the square. "Excellent," said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, who had been given to the ambassadors, for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These tents had been constructed during

the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Havre, they completely encircled the Hôtel de Ville. The only passage which led to the steps of the hotel, and which was not inclosed by the silken barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened towards the entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were intended to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Surrounding these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees buzzing about a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived, crossing the square at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily through the crowd of curious lookers-on, and, at the sight of these unexpected erections, uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a costume perfectly dazzling from its beauty, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hôtel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents, the soldiers barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, hopelessly infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by a couple of officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was in the interior of the Hôtel de Ville, engaged in attending to the execution of some orders given by De Guiche. At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the

doorway of one of the tents, rose with his usual indifference, and, perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. "What is the matter?" he said, in a gentle tone of voice, "and who is it making this disturbance?"

It so happened, that, at the moment he began to speak, silence had just been restored, and, although his voice was very soft and gentle in its tone, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall thin figure, and the listless expression of countenance of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was dressed very plainly, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, "Who may you be, monsieur?"

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in his usual tranquil tone of voice,—"*And you, monsieur?*"

"I, monsieur, am the Duke of Buckingham; I have hired all the houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, where I have business to transact; and as these houses are let, they belong to me, and, as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hôtel de Ville, you are not justified in preventing me passing to it."

"But who prevents you passing, monsieur?" inquired Manicamp.

"Your sentinels."

"Because you wish to pass on horseback, and orders have been given to let only persons on foot pass."

"No one has any right to give orders here, except myself," said Buckingham.

"On what grounds?" inquired Manicamp, with his soft tone. "Will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?"

"Because, as I have already told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square."

"We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us."

"You are mistaken, monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it."

"Forgive me, monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In *our* country, we say, the highway belongs to the king, therefore this square is his majesty's; and, consequently, as we are the king's ambassadors, the square belongs to us."

"I have already asked you who you are, monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

"My name is Manicamp," replied the young man, in a voice, whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Æolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, "When I hired these houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, the square was unoccupied: these barracks obstruct my sight; I hereby order them to be removed."

A hoarse and angry murmur ran through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and, followed by Raoul, arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes came up from the other. "Pardon me, my lord; but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents."

"Moreover, I would beg you to observe, monsieur, that the term 'barrack' is a highly objectionable one!" added Manicamp, graciously.

"You were saying, monsieur—" continued De Guiche.

"I was saying, monsieur le comte," resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger more marked than ever, although

in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, "I was saying, that it is impossible these tents can remain where they are."

"*Impossible!*" exclaimed De Guiche, "and why?"

"Because I object to them."

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

"You should the less object to them, monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise."

"*Abuse!*"

"Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Havre, without considering the members of the French court, who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation."

"The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the ground."

"Not in France, monsieur."

"Why not in France?"

"Because France is a country where politeness is observed."

"Which means!" exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

"Which means, monsieur," replied De Guiche, now rather pale, "that I caused these tents to be raised as habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambassadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your exactions have left us in the town; and that I, and those who are with me, shall remain in them, at least, until an authority more powerful, and more supreme, than your own shall dismiss me from them."

"In other words, until we are ejected, as the lawyers say," observed Manicamp, blandly.

"I know an authority, monsieur, which I trust is such as you will respect," said Buckingham, placing his hand on his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming all minds, was about to direct their swords against each other, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham's shoulder. "One word, my lord," he said.

"My right, my right, first of all," exclaimed the fiery young man.

"It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you."

"Very well, monsieur, but let your remarks be brief."

"One question is all I ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer."

"Speak, monsieur, I am listening."

"Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the grand-daughter of Henry IV.?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, bewildered.

"Have the goodness to answer me," persisted Raoul tranquilly.

"Do you mean to ridicule me, monsieur?" inquired Buckingham.

"Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess?"

"You know it perfectly well, monsieur, I should imagine."

"I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain."

"Proceed, monsieur, what do you mean to convey?"

Raoul approached the duke. "Are you aware, my lord," he said, lowering his voice, "that your extrava-

gances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits, with respect to any woman, are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force, when the lady in question is a princess of the blood royal!"

"Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, "do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?"

"Be careful, my lord," replied Bragelonne, coldly, "for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral's ship, you wearied the queen, and exhausted the admiral's patience. I was observing, my lord; and, at first, I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real significance of your madness."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Buckingham.

"One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who have guessed it."

"Are you aware, monsieur," said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, "are you aware that you are holding language towards me which requires to be checked?"

"Weigh your words well, my lord," said Raoul, haughtily; "my nature is not such that its vivacities need checking; whilst you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true Frenchmen; I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!"

"Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?"

"I am the son of the Comte de la Fère, my lord, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this—"

Buckingham clenched his hands, but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the gesture. "At the very

first word, beyond the respect and deference due to her royal highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her.—Be patient, my lord, for I am perfectly so.”

“You?”

“Undoubtedly. So long as madame remained on English territory, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you, that at the first mark of disrespect which you, in your insane attachment, exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow;—either I declare, in the presence of every one, the madness with which you are now affected, and I get you ignominiously ordered back to England; or if you prefer it, I will run my dagger through your throat in the presence of all here. This second alternative seems to me the least disagreeable, and I think I shall hold to it.”

Buckingham had become paler than the lace collar around his neck. “M. de Bragelonne,” he said, “is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?”

“Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my lord, and he will hold quite another language to you.”

“But, M. de Bragelonne,” murmured the duke, in a voice, half-choked, and putting his hand to his neck,—“Do you not see I am choking?”

“If your death were to take place at this moment, my lord,” replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, “I should, indeed, regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks; not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner.”

“You are right, you are right,” said the young man, almost beside himself. “Yes, yes: better to die, than to

suffer as I do at this moment." And he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones; and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust his hand aside. "Be careful what you do," he said; "if you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action; and if you were to kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham remained a minute gasping for breath; during this interval, his lips quivered, his fingers worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered as though in delirium. Then suddenly, he said, "M. de Bragelonne, I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are, indeed, a worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents." And he threw his arms round Raoul's neck. All who were present, astounded at this conduct, which was the very reverse of what was expected, considering the violence of the one adversary, and the determination of the other, began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham somewhat against his inclination; but, at all events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who, until that moment, had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the meantime, the procession of the princess arrived, and had it not been for Bragelonne, two armies would have been engaged together in conflict, and blood have been shed upon the flowers with which the ground was covered. At the appearance, however, of the banners borne at the head of the procession, complete order was restored.

CHAPTER XXX.

NIGHT.

CONCORD returned to its place amidst the tents. English and French rivaled each other in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travelers. The English forwarded to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to greet the arrival of the young princess; the French in return invited the English to a supper, which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration with which she was treated by two or three, she appeared an object of worship. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England for England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, that love for a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future opened before them. After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had partially dispersed, and the sound of the music and cheering of the crowd could be heard only in the distance; when the night had closed in, wrapping, with its star-covered mantle, the sea, the harbor, the town, and surrounding country, De Guiche, still excited by the great events of the day, returned to his tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress, that Bragelonne kept

his eyes fixed on him until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the partition of the tent, and remained thus, his face buried in his hands, with heaving chest and restless limbs.

"You are suffering?" asked Raoul.

"Cruelly."

"Bodily, I suppose?"

"Yes; bodily."

"This has indeed been a harassing day," continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

"Yes; a night's rest will probably restore me."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No; I wish to talk to you."

"You shall not speak to me, Guiche, until you have first answered my questions."

"Proceed then."

"You will be frank with me?"

"I always am."

"Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?"

"I suspect."

"Because he is in love with Madame, is it not?"

"One could almost swear to it, to observe him."

"You are mistaken; there is nothing of the kind."

"It is you who are mistaken, Raoul; I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action the whole day."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and find subject for your muse everywhere."

"I can perceive love clearly enough."

"Where it does not exist?"

"Nay, where it does exist."

"Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, Guiche?"

"I am convinced of what I say," said the count.

"Now, inform me, count," said Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, "what has happened to render you so clear-sighted?"

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "Self-love, I suppose."

"Self-love is a pedantic word, Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, generally, you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening."

"I am fatigued."

"Listen to me, Guiche; we have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses dying from exhaustion, or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue that saddens you to-night."

"It is annoyance, then."

"What annoyance?"

"That of this evening."

"The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?"

"Of course; is it not vexatious for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to witness the devotion of an Englishman to our future mistress, the second lady in point of rank in the kingdom?"

"Yes, you are right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham."

"No; still he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves; and, had it not been for you, for your admirable prudence, for your singular decision of character, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town."

"You observe, however, that he has changed his tactics."

"Yes, certainly; but this is the very thing that amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice, what did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!" De Guiche pronounced the latter words with so marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble character of the young man's countenance expressed a displeasure which could easily be read.

"What I said to him, count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen to me. I said, 'You are regarding with wistful feelings, and most injurious desire, the sister of your prince,—her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young lady to escort her to her husband.'"

"You spoke to him in that manner?" asked Guiche, coloring.

"In those very terms; I even added more. 'How would you regard us,' I said, 'if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain other than sentiments of the most perfect respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?'"

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, as he covered his eyes and face with the other.

"But," continued Raoul, not interrupted by this movement of his friend, "Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more, for I said, 'Learn, my lord, that we gentlemen of France devote ourselves to our sovereigns by sacrificing for them our affections, as well as our for-

tunes and our lives : and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts that set the heart on fire, we extinguish the flame, even if it has to be done by shedding our blood for the purpose. Thus it is that the honor of three is saved : our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your grace ; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' In this manner, my dear Guiche," continued Raoul, "I addressed the Duke of Buckingham ; and he admitted I was right and resigned himself unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly ; he seized Raoul's hand, his face, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke magnificently," he said, in a half-choked voice ; "you are indeed a friend, Raoul. But now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it !"

"Yes ; I need repose. Many things have agitated me to-day, both in mind and body ; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, as he withdrew. The count advanced a step towards his friend, and pressed him warmly in his arms. But in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid ; the tempest had passed away, and the sweet influences of the evening had restored life, peace, and security everywhere. A few fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and indicated from their appearance a continuance of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the shadows of the tents, intersected by the golden moonbeams, formed as it

were a huge mosaic of jet and yellow flagstones. Soon, however, the entire town was wrapped in slumber; a feeble light still glimmered in Madame's apartment, which looked out upon the square, and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to be the image of the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of life's anxieties, and in whom the flame of existence sinks placidly as sleep steals over the body. Bragelonne quitted the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that, after a few moments' pause, the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche, his eyes glittering in the obscurity, fastened ardently upon the princess's sitting apartment, which was partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. The soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his nature could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts that established, between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess, a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy—a bond created by thoughts imprinted with so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused happy and loving dreams to alight upon the perfumed couch, which the count, with the eyes of his soul, devoured so eagerly. But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square was opened too, the casement of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the

princess's apartment his prayers and the wild visions of his love.

Raoul could not resist smiling, as, thinking of Madame, he said to himself, "Hers is, indeed, a heart well besieged;" and then added, compassionately, as he thought of Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too; it is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, that he has an army to safeguard for him that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers, listened to the loud and uncivil slumbers of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he was wearing his blue and gold, instead of his violet suit.

Then he turned towards the night breeze which bore towards him, he seemed to think, the distant song of the nightingale; and, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or even a larger number of eyes, quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham, were coveting his own idol in the château at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very conscientious garrison," said he to himself, sighing aloud.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

THE next day the *fêtes* took place, accompanied by all the pomp and animation that the resources of the town and the cheerful disposition of men's minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Havre, every preparation for the departure had been made. After Madame

had taken leave of the English fleet, and, once again, had saluted the country in saluting its flags, she entered her carriage, surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would accompany the admiral to England ; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing Madame to proceed to Paris, almost unprotected. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany Madame, the young duke selected a corps of gentlemen and officers to form part of his own suite, so that it was almost an army that now set out towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route. The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its perfumed foliage on their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a paradise to the new sister of the king. *Fêtes* and brilliant displays received them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything ; De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the duke, and Buckingham, in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days belonged. But, alas ! the poor duke could perceive that the image of that country so cherished by himself became, from day to day, more and more effaced in Madame's mind, in exact proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgment, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery horses was thrown away, for it was only casually and by the merest

accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks, which were thrown carelessly around, or bestowed elsewhere, to produce in the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper, and address; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees, or of rolling in the ditches, over the gates and barriers which they passed, or down the steep declivities of the hills. Madame, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again entered into conversation with her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors. Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy; an unknown, unheard of anguish glided through his veins, and laid siege to his heart; and then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct, and that he wished to correct, by the humblest submission, his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amidst the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from Madame as a recompense, and yet her speech seemed almost a reproach.

"That is well, my lord," she said, "now you are reasonable."

Or from Raoul, "Your grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul's remarks, for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count, or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture, or a disturbance—perhaps even exile itself.

From the moment of that excited conversation the two young men had held in front of the tents at Havre, when Raoul made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him, and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their mutual friend, in whose praise Buckingham was nearly as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes' presence, who had, during the whole journey, been exceedingly annoyed at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche. De Wardes had that keen and merciless penetration most evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and divined the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating the subject with the same reserve which Raoul practiced; instead of regarding with that respect, which was their due, the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count the ever-sounding chord of juvenile audacity and pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Nantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attendance on the princess, who already treated him without reserve, on account of his versatile fancy, his frank courtesy of manner, and conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue of a friend has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

Madness it would be, I admit, if Madame were really indifferent to your martyrdom; but she takes so much notice of it, observes it to such an extent, that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, M. de Bragelonne may not denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking De Bragelonne."

"Come, come, a truce to child's play," replied the count's evil genius, in an undertone; "you know as well as I do what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess's glance softens as she looks at you;—you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night."

"True, De Wardes, quite true: but what good is there in your telling me all that?"

"Is it not important to know the exact position of affairs?"

"No, no; not when I am a witness of things that are enough to drive one mad."

"Stay, stay," said De Wardes; look, she calls you,—do you understand? Profit by the occasion, while your pedagogue is absent."

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Raoul, suddenly stepping across the barrier against which the previous moment the two friends had been leaning. "The pedagogue is here, and has overheard you."

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul's voice, which he

recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul; "you know perfectly well that, until our journey is at an end, every demonstration of that nature is useless. Why do you distill into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness that infects your own? As regards myself, you wish to arouse a feeling of deep dislike against a man of honor—my father's friend, and my own; and as for the count you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not, with greater justice, regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was deceived, I find, in terming you a pedagogue. The tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit, and not of a gentleman. Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, monsieur," said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert is untrue?"

"You give me the lie and will not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, monsieur, not to kill you until Madame shall have been delivered safely into her husband's hands."

"Kill me! Believe me, monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills; and, not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, when a befitting time arrives, I will avenge his name—a name you have dishonored."

"Take care, monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly, appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which savors of assassination, and therefore, ill becomes a gentleman."

"What did you say, my lord?" said De Wardes, turning round towards him.

"I said, monsieur, that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears."

"Very well, monsieur, if what you say is true," exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, "I at least find in you one who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like."

"I take them in the manner they cannot but be understood," replied Buckingham, with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which, even in ordinary conversation, gave a tone of defiance to everything he said; "M. de Bragelonne is my friend, you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes cast a look upon De Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke's defiance.

"It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted."

"At all events you insult some one."

"Yes, I insulted M. d'Artagnan," resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this was the only means of stinging Raoul, so as to awaken his anger.

"That, then," said Buckingham, "is another matter."

"Precisely so," said De Wardes; "it is the province of M. d'Artagnan's friends to defend him."

"I am entirely of your opinion," replied the duke, who

had regained all his indifference of manner: "if M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but when you say that it is a quarrel of M. d'Artagnan——"

"You will of course leave me to deal with the matter," said De Wardes.

"Nay, on the contrary, for I draw my sword," said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; "for if M. d'Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine."

De Wardes was thunderstruck.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued Buckingham, "is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours." At the same moment Buckingham drew his sword gracefully from its scabbard, saluted Raoul, and put himself on guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

"Stay gentlemen," said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants, "the affair is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost in the presence of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d'Artagnan, with whom he is not even acquainted."

"What, monsieur," said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, "do you assert that I do not know M. d'Artagnan?"

"Certainly not; you do not know him," replied Raoul, coldly, "and you are even not aware where he is to be found."

"Not know where he is?"

"Such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M. d'Artagnan where he is to be found." De Wardes turned pale. "Well,

monsieur," continued Raoul. "I will tell you where M. d'Artagnan is: he is now in Paris; when on duty he is to be met with at the Louvre,—when not on duty, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d'Artagnan can be easily discovered at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, show your courage in seeking him out, and afford him an opportunity of giving you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but of himself." De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "For shame, M. de Wardes! so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publication of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that; the king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time,—and his majesty will be in the right."

"Excuses," murmured De Wardes; "mere pretexts."

"Really, M. De Wardes," resumes Raoul, "such remarks are the idlest bluster. You know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels, and will probably fight eleven. His name alone is significant enough. As far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Sens, at Bleneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front of the line, while you—I say this parenthetically—were a hundred paces behind it. True it is, that on that occasion there was far too great a concourse of persons present for your courage to be observed, and on that account perhaps, you did not reveal it; while here, it would be a display, and would excite remark—you wish that others should talk about you, in what manner you do not care. Do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes, to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword, "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne,

for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward and raised his sword, threateningly, against Raoul, who had scarcely time to put himself in a posture of defense.

"Take care, monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" said De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do: immediately on our arrival at Paris I will conduct you to M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M. d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received the sword-thrust in due course, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the Gospel, which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne."

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed lightning, causing De Wardes involuntarily to fall back. Buckingham, also, who had perceived their expression, threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he had expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this injury for the last; he clasped his sword firmly in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name; but I know too well that the Comte de la Fère is too upright and honorable a man to allow me to fear for a single moment that there is, as you insinuate, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct; you are wanting in

courtesy, in reproaching me with misfortune. It matters little, however, the insult has been given, and I consider myself insulted accordingly. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, monsieur," replied De Wardes with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and now, after I shall have received his, you offer me one from yourself."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in all affairs of that nature, M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skillful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father; in other words, to spare your life at least, so as to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright; for you have the heart of a viper, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you," said De Wardes, "be assured of it."

"Allow me, monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne; M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah!" said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now." And, drawing his sword he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" said Buckingham.

"Be easy," said Raoul, "it will not be very long."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity, that at the first clashing of the steel blades Buckingham clearly saw that Raoul was only trifling with his

adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the combat. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil, instead of a sword; having retreated a step, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter within his own, and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the barrier. Then as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waist-band, and hurled his adversary to the other end of the barrier, trembling and mad with rage.

"We shall meet again," murmured De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

"I have done nothing for the last hour," said Raoul, "but say the same thing." Then, turning towards the duke, he said, "I entreat you to be silent about this affair; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it;—forget it, too."

"Dear viscount," said the duke, pressing within his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, "allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous,—he will kill you."

"My father," replied Raoul, "lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives."

"Your father had good friends, viscount."

"Yes," sighed Raoul, "such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them."

"Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment I offer you my friendship;" and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. "In my family," added Buckingham, "you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, we die to save our friends."

"I know it well, duke," replied Raoul.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT
OF MADAME.

Nothing further interrupted the journey. Under a pretext that was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose for their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne admitting De Guiche into their friendship, in concert with him, sang the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of investigation. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly, but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who, without any fear as far as her own voice was concerned, sought opportunities of so perilously distinguishing herself. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions that find gratification in an excess of sensitiveness of feeling, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilette, an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offense, were showered on the three young men with overwhelming force; and, from her well-stored arsenal issued glances,

kindly recognitions, and a thousand other little charming attentions which were intended to strike at long range, the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities she passed through, pages, populace, and servants ; it was wholesale slaughter, a general devastation. By the time Madame arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers : and brought in her train to Paris half a dozen men who were almost mad about her, and *two* who were, indeed, literally out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction, and, as his heart was already engaged, he arrived in the capital full of indifference and distrust. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the queen of England respecting the power of fascination which Madame possessed, and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied : "Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or born in obscurity ; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious, and self-willed." De Wardes and Manicamp, in their self-assumed character of courtiers had announced the princess's arrival. The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king's military household, who had arrived to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain, the princess and her mother had changed their heavy traveling carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a light, richly decorated chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a parasol of embroidered silk, fringed with feathers, sat the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her delicate

skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he showed his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders as he listened to his compliments, while Buckingham and De Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but very indifferent attention. But, during their progress, as he observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed earnestness to the carriage-door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, "Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented to your highness a short while ago; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Ah, yes, I remember."

"Madame's knight," added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

"What do you say?" replied the prince.

"I said 'Madame's knight.'"

"Has she a recognized knight, then?"

"One would think you can judge of that for yourself; look, only, how they are laughing and flirting. All three of them."

"What do you mean by *all three*?"

"Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?"

"Yes, I see. But what does that prove?"

"That Madame has two admirers instead of one."

"You poison the simplest thing!"

"I poison nothing. Ah! your royal highness's mind is perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife and you are not satisfied."

"The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the Chevalier de Lorraine whenever it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. "The princess is pretty," said he, very negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"You say 'yes' like a 'no.' She has very beautiful black eyes."

"Yes, but small."

"That is so, but they are brilliant. She is tall, and of a good figure."

"I fancy she stoops a little, my lord?"

"I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance."

"Yes, but her face is thin."

"I thought her teeth beautiful."

"They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly, I was wrong, my lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife."

"But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?"

"Certainly, and he thinks so, too; for look, my lord, he is redoubling his attentions to Madame to prevent your effacing the impression he has made."

Monsieur made a movement of impatience, but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass across the chevalier's lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. "Why," said he, "should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin? Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"A great change has taken place in her since then, prince. At the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and scarcely so proud, either. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!"

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He would probably have retorted, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. He had remarked the prince and the chevalier together, and full of anxious attention; he seemed to try and guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged. The chevalier, whether he had some treacherous object in view, or from imprudence, did not take the trouble to dissimulate. "Count," he said, "you're a man of excellent taste."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied De Guiche; "but why do you say that?"

"Well, I appeal to His Highness."

"No doubt of it," said Monsieur; "and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier."

"Well, since that is decided, I resume. You have been in the princess's society, count, for the last eight days, have you not?"

"Yes," replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

"Well then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?"

"Of her personal appearance?" returned De Guiche, stupefied.

"Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, of herself, in fact."

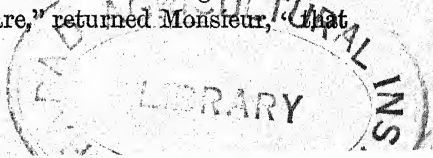
Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated answering.

"Come, come, De Guiche," resumed the chevalier, laughingly, "tell us your opinion frankly: the prince commands it."

"Yes, yes," said the prince, "be frank."

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

"I am perfectly well aware," returned Monsieur, "that



the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?"

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defense which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. "I do not find Madame," he said, "either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking."

"What! count," exclaimed the chevalier, "you who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait."

De Guiche colored violently. Very fortunately his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation. "What portrait?" he murmured, joining them again. The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him.

"Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?"

"I do not remember. I had forgotten the portrait; it quite escaped my recollection."

"And yet it made a very marked impression upon you," said the chevalier.

"That is not unlikely."

"Is she witty, at all events?" inquired the duke.

"I believe so, my lord."

"Is M. de Buckingham witty too?" said the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"My own opinion is, that he must be," replied the chevalier, "for he makes Madame laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, which never happens to a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton."

"Of course, then, he must be clever," said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to

whom he addressed a remark, and in that way changed the conversation. The *entrée* was brilliant and joyous.

The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest possible magnificence. Madame and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where, during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., the naked walls, the uneven floorings, the ceilings matted with cobwebs, the vast dilapidated chimney-places, the cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. The richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones, and pictures, with their richly-gilded frames; in every direction could be seen candelabra, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; in every direction also were guards of the proudest military bearing with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the antechambers and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass had formerly been allowed to luxuriate, as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive that solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the fit accompaniments of fallen monarchy; the immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, were now thronged with courtiers whose horses were pacing and prancing to and fro. The carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who, during her widowhood and exile, had sometimes gone without wood for her fire, and bread for her table, whom the meanest attendants at the château had treated with indifference and contempt. And so, Madame Henrietta once more returned to the

Louvre, with her heart more swollen with bitter recollections than her daughter's, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, with triumph and delight. She knew but too well this brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, a throne second to none in Europe, while the worse than indifferent reception she had before met with was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate. After the princesses had been installed in their apartments and had rested, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having, in like manner, recovered from their fatigue, they resumed their accustomed habits and occupations. Raoul began by setting off to see his father, who had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan, who, however, being engaged in the organization of a military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next sought out De Guiche, but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds. He monopolized every embroiderer, jeweler, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and himself a vigorous contest ensued, invariably a courteous one, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Maréchal de Grammont had only allowed his son 60,000 francs. So Buckingham laughed and spent his money. Guiche groaned in despair, and would have shown it more violently, had it not been for the advice De Bragelonne gave him.

"A million!" repeated De Guiche daily; "I must submit. Why will not the maréchal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you would throw it away," said Raoul.

"What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further."

"But what need is there to die?" said Raoul.

"I do not wish to be conquered in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear count," said Manicamp, "elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult accomplishment."

"Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only got 60,000 francs."

"A very embarrassing state of things, truly," said De Wardes; "even if you spent as much as Buckingham, there is only 940,000 francs difference."

"Where am I to find them?"

"Get into debt."

"I am in debt already."

"A greater reason for getting further."

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this extravagant profuseness delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of the Comte de Grammont nothing but miracles were attempted. While all this was going on, Madame was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already dispatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. "What can this Malicorne want with me?" thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, "Let him wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," said the valet.

"Admit him at once," said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered as brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword at his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: "M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you."

Raoul colored. "From a lady," said he, "from a lady of Blois?"

"Yes, monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Thank you, monsieur; I recollect you now," said Raoul. "And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais require of me?"

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket, which he offered to Raoul.

"My own letters, is it possible?" he said, turning pale; "my letters, and the seals unbroken?"

"Monsieur, your letters did not find, at Blois, the person to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois, then?" exclaimed Raoul.

"Eight days ago."

"Where is she, then?"

"In Paris."

"How was it known that these letters were from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal," said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. "Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly amiable," he said; "she is always kind and charming."

"Always, monsieur."

"Surely she could give me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I never could find her in this immense city."

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. "You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn."

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and inclosed were these words:—
“Paris, Palais-Royal. The day of the nuptial blessing.”

“What does this mean?” inquired Raoul of Malicorne;
“you probably know?”

“I do, monsieur.”

“For pity’s sake, tell me, then.”

“Impossible, monsieur.”

“Why so?”

“Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so.”

Raoul looked at his strange visitor, and remained silent;—“At least, tell me whether it is fortunate or unfortunate.”

“That you will see.”

“You are very severe in your reservations.”

“Will you grant me a favor, monsieur?” said Malicorne.

“In exchange for that you refuse me?”

“Precisely.”

“What is it?”

“I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one. Could you get me admitted?”

“Certainly.”

“Do me this kindness, then, I entreat.”

“Most willingly, monsieur; come with me.”

“I am exceedingly indebted to you, monsieur,” said Malicorne.

“I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp.”

“I am, monsieur; but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me sword in hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket. He wanted to kill me.”

"I can well believe it," laughed Raoul. "I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as your introducer, too."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SURPRISE FOR MADAME DE MONTALAIS.

MADAME's marriage was celebrated in the chapel of the Palais Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly dejected, that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him as far as pallor and discomfiture were concerned.

"Take care, count," said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Condé was attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides on either side of the nave of the church. The count, after that, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward towards the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It

was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law's appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, "Do you not see how much he resembles his father?" and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed quite discontented. After the reception of the princess and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king's permission to present to him as well as to Madame the persons belonging to their new household.

"Are you aware, vicomte," inquired the Prince de Condé of Raoul, "whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?"

"I have not the slightest idea, monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"You affect ignorance, surely."

"In what way, monseigneur?"

"You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince."

"That may be so, monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche on his part, never having been questioned, did not communicate any particulars to me."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I saw Manicamp at Havre, and during the journey here, but I was no more inquisitive with him than I had been towards De Guiche. Besides, is it likely that Manicamp should know anything of such matters? for he is a person of only secondary importance."

"My dear vicomte, do you not know better than that?" said the prince; "why, it is these persons of secondary

importance who, on such occasions, have all the influence; and the truth is, that nearly everything has been done through Manicamp's presentations to De Guiche, and through De Guiche to Monsieur."

"I assure you, monseigneur, I was ignorant of that," said Raoul, "and what your highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me."

"I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! ah! what pretty faces!"

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the *salon*, conducted by Madame de Navailles, and to Manicamp's credit be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Condé assigned him, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young, fair-complexioned girl, from twenty to one-and-twenty years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band and was the first presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he saluted his wife, repeated, "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Ah! ah!" said the Prince de Condé to Raoul, "*she* is presentable enough."

"Yes," said Raoul, "but has she not a somewhat haughty style?"

"Bah! we know these airs very well, vicomte; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look, there, indeed, is a pretty face."

"Yes," said Raoul, "and one I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles. The name and Christian name were carefully repeated by Monsieur.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance-doorway.

"What's the matter?" inquired the prince; "was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a 'Great heavens'?"

"No, monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that pretty *blonde* who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière!" said Madame de Navailles; and, as this name resounded through his whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his breast to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more; and the prince, finding him nothing more than a mere echo which remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

"Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul, and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight confidence at the different persons present; and, having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment which her own and her friend's presence there caused the unhappy lover. Her waggish and malicious look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and which yet he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed him on the rack. As for Louise, whether from

natural timidity, or some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes constantly cast down; intimidated, dazzled, and with impeded respiration, she withdrew herself as much as possible aside, unaffected even by the nudges Montalais gave her with her elbow. The whole scene was a perfect enigma for Raoul, the key to which he would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, not even Malicorne; who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of good birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, as her attendant satellite, seemed constrained to gravitate. As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his right hand that were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine, conversing together. It is true they were talking in tones so low, that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one may be engaged in conversation, is a talent that cannot be immediately acquired by new comers. Long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seem like the conversation of a group of statues. In fact, in the king's and the queen's grand assemblies, while their majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening in the midst of the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this

art, so much a matter of etiquette, that from the movement of the lips, he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Vallière? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the chevalier,—“oh, I know her; she is a good sort of a girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Vallière is a charming girl, slightly lame.”

"Ah! bah!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes, there are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms about lame ladies."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers in order to settle matters with them at the earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued:

"Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"You, I, or De Guiche,—whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Take care, gentlemen," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious to put a stop to De Wardes' reply; "take care, Madame is listening to us."

Raoul thrust his hand up to the wrist into his *justau-*

corps in great agitation. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he thought, "has come here only with an honorable object in view, and under honorable protection; and I must learn what that object is which she has in view, and who it is that protects her." And following Malicorne's maneuver, he made his way toward the group of the maids of honor. The presentations were soon over. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the venom he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the faces in the court, and suspecting that some of their hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he quitted the apartment; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character, and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies of the court. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Buckingham devoted himself to Madame Chalais and Mademoiselle de Lafayette, whom Madame had already distinguished by her notice, and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois, and with Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.

Amid these varied political and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention; but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to amuse herself with his innumerable questions and his astonishment. Raoul had gone direct to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had saluted her with the profoundest re-

spect, at which Louise blushed, and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, monsieur le vicomte, here we are, you see."

"I do, indeed, see you," said Raoul smiling, "and it is exactly because you are here that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, Malicorne; really you are exceedingly indiscreet." At this remark Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness, became mocking in its expression.

"You wished for an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"It is surely worth one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Vallière a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should not she be a maid of honor, as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray, accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied he perceived they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, vicomte."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Assuredly not," replied Raoul, eagerly; "you know very well that such is not my feeling; were you called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised; how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance that amazes me is, that I should have learned it only to-day, and that by the merest accident."

"That is true," replied Montalais, with her usual giddiness; "you know nothing about it, and there is no reason you should. M. de Bragelonne had written several letters to you, but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters falling into her hands; I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul, so that he believed you were still at Blois while you were here in Paris, and had no idea whatever, indeed, how high you had risen in rank."

"Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?"

"Why should I? to give him an opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we had so much trouble in effecting? Certainly not."

"Am I so very severe, then?" said Raoul, inquiringly.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris—you were away; Louise was weeping her eyes out; interpret that as you please; I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind; I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave these young people together: they have many things to talk about; give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor conferred upon you, M. Malicorne."

"Forgive me," said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation, the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais; "forgive me, but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of; for if

protection be extended towards you, Mademoiselle Montalais,—for which, indeed, so many reasons exist,” added Raoul, bowing, “I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should be similarly cared for.”

“But, M. Raoul,” said Louise, innocently, “there is no difference in the matter, and I do not see why I should not tell it you myself; it was M. Malicorne who obtained it for me.”

Raoul remained for a moment almost stupefied, asking himself if they were trifling with him; he then turned round to interrogate Malicorne, but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière attempted to follow her friend, but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her.

“Louise, one word, I beg.”

“But, M. Raoul,” said Louise, blushing, “we are alone. Every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us.”

“Fear nothing,” said the young man, smiling, “we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked.”

“But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul.”

“Do not be alarmed, I am acquainted with these usages of the court; you will not be on duty until to-morrow: a few minutes are at your disposal, which will enable you to give me the information I am about to have the honor to ask you for.”

“How serious you are, M. Raoul!” said Louise.

“Because the circumstances are serious. Are you listening?”

“I am listening: I would only repeat, monsieur, that we are quite alone.”

“You are right,” said Raoul, and, offering her his hand,

he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the courtyard. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: "You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have intrusted all my hopes."

"Yes, M. Raoul," she answered softly; "yes, M. Raoul, I know that."

"You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend—why have you shown suspicion of me?"

Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not answer. "I fondly thought you loved me," said Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; "I fondly thought you consented to all the plans we had, together, laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the walks of Cour-Cheverny, under the avenue of poplar trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise. Is it possible," he inquired, breathing with difficulty, "that you no longer love me?"

"I did not say so," replied Louise, softly.

"Oh! tell me the truth, I implore you. All my hopes in life are centered in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure too soon becomes corrupt—where all that is young too soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, so as not to hear what may be said; shut your eyes, so as not to see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you.

Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

"Yes, it was so, then!" exclaimed Raoul, delightedly; "that was, then, your reason for coming here. I love you as I never yet loved you. Thanks, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to shield you from every lure. Louise, a maid of honor, in the court of a young princess in these days of free manners and inconstant affections—a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her; this state of things cannot continue; you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes, here is my hand, Louise: will you place yours within it?"

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me perfectly free."

"Yet——"

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father."

"Reflect, M. Raoul; wait."

"Wait! it is impossible. Reflect, Louise, when *you* are concerned, it would be insulting,—give me your hand, dear Louise; I am my own master. My father will consent, I know; give me your hand, do not keep me waiting thus. One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that, in order to change you forever, nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a look from the king."

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this latter word, than La Vallière became as pale as death, no doubt from fear

at seeing the young man excite himself. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled, without adding a syllable; disappearing without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand; he received the compact as a solemn bargain wrung by affection from her child-like timidity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

RAOUL quitted the Palais Royal full of ideas that admitted no delay in execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were being celebrated with exceeding animation by the courtiers, but to the despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours he arrived at Blois. As he traveled along, he marshaled his arguments in the most becoming manner. Fever also is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack. Athos was in his study, making additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, accompanied by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

"You seem to come on a matter of importance," said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, pointing to a seat.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the young man; "and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention that has never yet failed me."

"Speak, Raoul."

"I present the case to you, monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is in Paris as one of Madame's maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter ; I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière above everything ; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be assailed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to my marriage."

While this communication was being made to him, Athos maintained the profoundest silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his address with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing a manifest emotion to escape him at every word. Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness.

"You have reflected well upon it?" he inquired.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I believe you are already acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice ; "but you added, that if I persisted——"

"You do persist then?"

Bragelonne stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in wishing it."

Raoul passed his trembling hand across his forehead to remove the perspiration that collected there. Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched by pity. He rose and said,—

"It is no matter. My own personal feelings are not to be taken into consideration since yours are concerned ; you need my assistance ; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul, I have more than mere indulgence for you in my heart."

Raoul kissed as devotedly as a lover could have done the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready ; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Nothing whatever, monsieur, only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well thought, Raoul ! After, or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king ; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double proof ; I will grant your request without delay, Raoul."

The count approached the window, and, leaning out, called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

"My horses, Grimaud," continued the count.

"Why this order, monsieur?" inquired Raoul.

"We shall set off in a few hours."

"Whither?"

"For Paris."

"Paris, monsieur?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Certainly."

"Well, ought we not to go there?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension. "I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience, and a letter merely——"

"You mistake my position, Raoul ; it is not respectful that a simple gentleman, such as I am, should write to

his sovereign. I wish to speak, I ought to speak, to the king, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul."

"You overpower me with your kindness, monsieur."

"How do you think his majesty is affected?"

"Towards me, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Excellently well disposed."

"You *know* that to be so?" continued the count.

"The king has himself told me so."

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of M. d'Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Grève, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king's service. I have reason to believe that, vanity apart, I stand well with his majesty."

"So much the better."

"But I entreat you, monsieur," pursued Raoul, "not to maintain towards me your present grave and serious manner. Do not make me bitterly regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else."

"That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary; you require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew very well, that, after the expression of his father's wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos slowly pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul extremely; the affection with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father's heart remain void, and closed to its influence? Bragelonne, therefore, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed,—

"It is impossible, monsieur, you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Vallière? In Heaven's name, she is so good, so gentle and pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her accordingly. Does any secret repugnance, or any hereditary dislike, exist between you and her family?"

"Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily of the valley," said Athos; "observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its leaves."

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, he said, courageously,—“One word of explanation, I beg, monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man.”

"In that case," replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, "prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I would have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wish you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse. "I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was."

Athos turned pale; then, knitting his brows like the greatest of all the heathen deities:—"I am waiting to learn the reply you made," he demanded, in an imperious manner.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me" murmured the young man, sinking at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

"What is your reply, monsieur?" inquired the count, stamping his feet upon the ground.

"Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately,

my adversary placed himself on guard, I struck his sword over the palisade, and threw him after it."

"Why did you suffer him to live?"

"The king has prohibited dueling, and, at that moment, I was an ambassador of the king."

"Very well," said Athos, "but all the greater reason I should see his majesty."

"What do you intend to ask him?"

"Authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me."

"If I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me."

"Did I reproach you, Raoul?"

"Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?"

"I will implore his majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition."

"Are conditions necessary with me, monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed."

"On one condition, I repeat," continued Athos; "that you tell me the name of the man who spoke of your mother in that way."

"What need is there that you should know his name; the offense was directed against myself, and the permission once obtained from his majesty, to revenge it is my affair."

"Tell me his name, monsieur."

"I will not allow you to expose yourself."

"Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say."

"You insist upon it?"

"I demand it."

"The Vicomte de Wardes."

"Very well," said Athos, tranquilly, "I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and, instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXXV.

MONSIEUR BECOMES JEALOUS OF THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

WHILE the Comte de la Fère was proceeding on his way to Paris, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais-Royal was the theater wherein a scene of what Molière would have called excellent comedy, was being performed. Four days had elapsed since his marriage, and Monsieur, having breakfasted very hurriedly, passed into his antechamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been overagreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone: the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only persons present at the meal, which lasted three-quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince's face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of one's friends but stimulates, and enjoyed at the same time both Monsieur's ill-humor and the vexation of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain the prince, who was very impatient to move, still at table. Monsieur at times repented the ascendancy which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those

moods, but he dreaded as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with nursing his anger without betraying it. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pâté* which the chevalier was attacking, and finally, not caring to betray his resentment, he gesticulated in a manner which Harlequin might have envied. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp, napkin in hand, rose also. Monsieur ran rather than walked, towards the antechamber, where, noticing an usher in attendance, he gave him some directions in a low tone of voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding passing through the breakfast apartment, he crossed several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was, in fact, more affectionate, and it might be, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathizing attentions all women are glad to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have been rejoiced to have had a daughter, almost found in this, her favorite son, the attentions, solicitude, and playful manners of a child of twelve years of age. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics, and receipts for compounding essences, in which she was very particular: and then, too, he kissed her hands and cheeks in the most childlike and endearing manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to

recommend. Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son; Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by right divine. With the king, her character was that of the queen-mother, with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that, of all places of refuge, a mother's heart is the most compassionate and surest. When quite a child, he always fled there for refuge when he and his brother quarreled, often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails, in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses respecting the right to a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire,—Philip, conqueror, but terrified at victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty, and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceable intervention, succeeded in arranging the disputes of her sons, and in sharing, at the same time, all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly upon his brother, felt disposed to show towards Anne of Austria more submission and attachment than his character really dictated. Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household, and she was already preparing her batteries to govern with the same absolute authority the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartment with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, gathering from appearances that assistance was required either by the weakest or the most rebellious. She was writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper,

and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's hands, and sat himself down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary civilities was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who, of his own accord, observed a respect towards her of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed in this regard, there must be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A good many things," murmured the prince, in a doleful tone of voice.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one that absorbs it more than others."

"One indeed has occupied me more than any other."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

Philip opened his mouth as if to express all the troubles his mind was filled with, and which he seemed to be waiting only for an opportunity of declaring. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart was overflowing with.

"Come, Philip, show a little firmness," said the queen-mother. "When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?"

"I do not say no, madame."

"Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take courage."

"In fact, madame, what I might possibly have to say must be kept a profound secret; for when a lady is in the case——"

"Ah! you are speaking of Madame, then?" inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

"Yes."

"Well, then, if you wish to speak of Madame, do not hesitate to do so. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, rest assured I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all you may have to say about her."

"Pray tell me, madame, in your turn, whether you have not remarked something?"

"Something! Philip? Your words almost frighten me, from their want of meaning. What do you mean by something?"

"Madame is pretty, certainly."

"No doubt of it."

"Yet not altogether beautiful."

"No, but as she grows older, she will probably become strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was, myself, very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty."

"And consequently others have remarked it."

"Undoubtedly, for a woman of ordinary rank is noticed—and with still greater reason a princess."

"She has been well brought up, I suppose?"

"Madame Henriette, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The princess's education may have been neglected, but her principles, I believe, are good. Such at least was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned to England, and I am ignorant what may have occurred there."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that there are some heads naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity."

"That is the very word, madame. I think the princess rather giddy."

"We must not exaggerate, Philip; she is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect in persons of high rank and position, is a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry, usually forms a brilliant court around her; her smile stimulates luxury, arouses wit, and even courage; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful."

"Thank you extremely, madame," said Philip, with some temper; "you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

"You know, madame," said Philip, dolefully, "whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married."

"Now, indeed, you alarm me. You have some serious cause of complaint against Madame."

"I do not precisely say it is serious."

"In that case, then, throw aside your doleful looks. If you show yourself to others in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband."

"The fact is," replied Philip, "I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall not be sorry if others know it."

"For shame, Philip."

"Well, then, madame, I will tell you frankly that I do not understand the life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for some reason or another. In the mornings

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there are visits, correspondences, and toilettes ; in the evenings, balls and concerts."

"You are jealous, Philip."

"I! Heaven forbid. Let others act the part of a jealous husband, not I. But I *am* annoyed."

"All these things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent, and, so long as you have nothing of greater importance—— Yet, listen; without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness. Certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses, even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous."

"Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty. You speak of frequent visits, and certain preferences—very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the true question."

"This is more serious than I thought. It is possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?"

"Precisely so."

"What, your wife, married only four days ago, prefers some other person to yourself! Take care, Philip, you exaggerate your grievances; in wishing to prove everything, you prove nothing."

The prince, bewildered by his mother's serious manner, wished to reply, but he could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

"You draw back, then?" said Anne of Austria. "I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgment of your mistake."

"No!" exclaimed Philip, "I do not draw back, and I will prove all I asserted. I spoke of preference and of visits, did I not? Well, listen."

Anne of Austria prepared herself to listen, with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always find in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

"Well," said Philip, "tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why does my wife retain an English court about her?" said Philip, as he crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

"For a very simple reason," returned Anne of Austria; "because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would be hardly polite—not politic certainly—to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or from any sacrifice."

"A wonderful sacrifice indeed," returned Philip, "to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for a crown than can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with?"

"In love, Philip! think what you are saying. Who is in love with Madame?"

"The Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you will defend him, too?"

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain recollections of a very tender and melancholy nature.

"The Duke of Buckingham?" she murmured.

"Yes; one of those arm-chair soldiers——"

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"This is too bad; my own mother takes the part of my

wife's lover against me," exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

"Philip, my son," exclaimed Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you. Your wife has no lover; and, had she one, it would not bethe Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the rights of hospitality are sure to be respected by them."

"The Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, madame," said Philip, "and may I ask if the English so very religiously respect what belongs to princes of France?"

Anne blushed a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but in reality to conceal her confusion from her son. "Really, Philip," she said, "you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me; reflect a little."

"There is no need for reflection, madame. I can see with my own eyes."

"Well, and what do you see?"

"That Buckingham never quits my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she ventures to accept them. Yesterday she was talking about *sachets à la violette*; well, our French perfumers, you know very well, madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success—our French perfumers, I say, have never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet à la violette*, and I am sure that the one my wife has came from him."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "you build your pyramids on needle points; be careful. What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his country-woman a receipt for a new essence?" These strange ideas,

I protest, painfully recall your father to me ; he who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son," said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how deeply he had wounded his mother's feelings. The queen turned pale, and pressed her clenched hands upon her bosom ; but, recovering herself immediately, she said, " You came here with some intention or another, I suppose ? "

" Certainly. "

" What was it ? "

" I came, madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to such behavior from the Duke of Buckingham. "

" What do you intend to do, then ? "

" I shall complain to the king. "

" And what do you expect the king to reply ? "

" Very well, then, " said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness. " Very well. I will right myself ! "

" What do you call righting yourself ? " inquired Anne of Austria, in alarm.

" I will have the Duke of Buckingham quit the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him. "

" You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip, " said the queen, " for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you. "

" Do you threaten me, madame ? " exclaimed Philip, almost in tears ; " do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints ? "

" I do not threaten you ; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain, that, to adopt

towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure—to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to plunge France and England into the most disastrous disagreement. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the king of France, does not know how to hide an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither true nor possible, and it is merely a matter of silly jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"Whatever you may know, I can only advise you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy ceremonious manner. "Explain what you really require, monsieur," she said.

"I do not require anything, madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not, of his own accord, discontinue his visits to my apartments I shall forbid him entrance."

"That is a point you will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that very conversation I forbid," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so; I will not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh!" said the queen-mother, with a melancholy arising from reflection, "never tyrannize over a wife—never

behave too haughtily or imperiously towards your own. A woman, unwillingly convinced is unconvinced."

"What is to be done, then?—I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your double-dealing advisers, your Chevalier de Lorraine—your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, madame."

"Send the duke to me, then; smile upon your wife, behave to her, to the king, to every one, as usual. But follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what any household comes to, that is troubled by advisers."

"You shall be obeyed, madame."

"And you will be satisfied at the result. Send the duke to me."

"That will not be difficult."

"Where do you suppose him to be?"

"At my wife's door, whose *levée* he is probably awaiting."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be good enough to tell the duke, that I shall be charmed if he will pay me a visit."

Philip kissed his mother's hand, and started off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FOREVER!

THE Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen-mother's invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d'Orléans.

When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbow resting on a table, and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips, were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she looked almost as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham's father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate prince, who lived for her alone, and died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender in its expression, that it denoted, not alone the indulgence of maternal affection, but a gentleness of expression like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

"Your majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to speak to me."

"Yes, duke," said the queen, in English; "will you be good enough to sit down?"

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him. After having abandoned the few first moments to the irrepressible emotions he experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. "What do you think of France?" she said, in French.

"It is a lovely country, madame," replied the duke.

"Had you ever seen it before?"

"Once only, madame."

"But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?"

"I prefer my own native land to France," replied the duke; "but if your majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Paris, I should prefer as a residence, I should be forced to answer, Paris."

Anne of Austria observed the ardent manner with which these words had been pronounced. "I am told, my lord, you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored palace."

"It was my father's residence," replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

"Those are indeed great advantages and *souvenirs*," replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections from which it is impossible voluntarily to detach one's self.

"In fact," said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, "sensitive persons live as much in the past or the future, as in the present."

"That is very true," said the queen, in a low tone of voice. "It follows, then, my lord," she added, "that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the past."

Buckingham raised his head and said, "I think not, madame."

"What do you mean?"

"On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France."

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to exhibit surprise. "Why?" she said. "Are you not in favor with the new king?"

"Perfectly so, madame, for his majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"It cannot," said the queen, "be because your fortune has diminished, for it is said to be enormous."

"My income, madame, has never been so large."

"There is some secret cause, then?"

"No, madame," said Buckingham, eagerly, "there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I prefer residence in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like the amusements, somewhat serious in their nature, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France."

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. "Amusements of a serious nature?" she said. "Has your grace well reflected on their seriousness?" The duke hesitated. "There is no amusement so serious," continued the queen, "as to prevent a man of your rank——"

"Your majesty seems to insist greatly on that point," interrupted the duke.

"Do you think so, my lord?"

"If you will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the delight which all experience who live in France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said, "Believe me, monsieur, nothing can equal a residence in one's own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to regret Spain. I have lived long, my lord, very long for a woman, and I confess to you, that not a year has passed I have not regretted Spain."

"Not one year, madame?" said the young duke, coldly. "Not one of those years when you reigned Queen of Beauty—as you still are, indeed?"

"A truce to flattery, duke, for I am old enough to be your mother." She emphasized these latter words in a manner, and with a gentleness, which penetrated Buck-

ingham's heart. "Yes," she said, "I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason, I will give you a word of advice."

"That advice being that I should return to London?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my lord."

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections. "It must be so," added the queen.

"What!" he again exclaimed, "am I seriously told that I *must* leave,—that I must exile myself,—that I am to flee at once?"

"Exile yourself, did you say? One would fancy France was your native country."

"Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love."

"Not another word, my lord; you forget whom you are addressing."

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. "Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are the first person in this kingdom, not only by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, madame. Have I, indeed, said anything you should answer with such a cruel remark? What have I betrayed?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said the queen, in a low tone of voice.

"I have said nothing,—I know nothing."

"You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides——"

"Besides," said the duke, "no one knows you are listening to me."

"On the contrary, it is known; you have all the defects and all the qualities of youth."

"I have been betrayed or denounced, then?"

"By whom?"

"By those who, at Havre, had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book."

"I do not know whom you mean."

"M. de Bragelonne, for instance."

"I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. M. de Bragelonne has said nothing."

"Who can it be, then? If any one, madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold——"

"What would you do, duke?"

"There are secrets which kill those who discover them."

"He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives: and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides,—he is a husband, a jealous man,—he is the second gentleman in France,—he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke turned pale as death. "You are very cruel, madame," he said.

"You see, Buckingham," said Anne of Austria, sadly, "how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself."

"If we fight, madame, we die on the field of battle," replied the young man, gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression."

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. "Villiers," she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, "what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son: a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not dream of it. What! in order to spare your tears am I to commit these crimes? Villiers! you speak of the dead;

the dead, at least, were full of respect and submission; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus deceptive, was like a gift or a favor conferred upon them."

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. "You are right, madame," he said, "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away; they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at."

"No," murmured Anne of Austria, "they were not forgotten. But who says you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one's behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness—grant me this favor; let me, for this also, be indebted to one of your name."

"It is for your sake, then, madame?"

"For mine alone."

"No one whom I shall leave behind me will venture to mock,—no prince even who shall say, 'I required it.'"

"Listen to me, duke," and hereupon the dignified features of the queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that, not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, duke, as I rely upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate, can afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother, duke?" replied the queen, with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, madame; yet I remember how she used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept."

"Villiers," murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man's neck, "look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep."

"I thank you, madame," said the young man, affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; "I feel there is indeed still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love."

The queen-mother looked at him and pressed his hand. "Go," she said.

"When must I leave? Command me."

"At any time that may suit you, my lord," resumed the queen; "you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening; but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave."

"My wish?" murmured the young duke.

"Yes, duke."

"And shall I never return to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. "It would be a consolation for me," she said, "if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at Saint-Denis beside the king, my husband."

"Madame, you are goodness itself; the tide of prosperity is setting in on you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you."

"In that case you will not come for some time, then," said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

"I shall not return," said Buckingham, "young as I am. Death does not reckon by years; it is impartial; some die young, some reach old age."

"I will not harbor any sorrowful ideas, duke. Let me comfort you; return in two years. I perceive from your face that the very idea which saddens you so much now, will have disappeared before six months have passed, and will be not only dead but forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned you."

"I think you judged me better a little while ago, madame," replied the young man, "when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham."

"Silence," said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection she could not restrain. "Go, go; spare me and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen; you are the subject of the king of England; King Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers,—farewell."

"Forever!" replied the young man, and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotion.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then looking at herself in the glass, murmured, "It has been truly said, that a woman who has truly loved is always young, and that the bloom of twenty years ever lies concealed in some secret cloister of the heart."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

KING LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT THINK MADEMOISELLE DE LA VAL-
LIERE EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A
GENTLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGE-
LONNE.

RAOUL and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had held the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had

scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His majesty had passed a portion of the morning in looking over, with madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture, of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards, and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet. Raoul entered the antechamber at the very moment the two ministers quitted it, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What do you want, M. de Bragelonne?"

The young man approached: "An audience, sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fère, who had just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fère at hand?"

"He is below, and awaits your majesty's permission."

"Let him come up at once," said the king, and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. Let me hope, comte," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your majesty," replied the comte, "that I am indeed come for that purpose."

"That is well," said the king, joyously.

"It is not for myself, sire."

"So much the worse; but, at least, I will do for your *protégé* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."

"Your majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, comte."

"Not altogether so, sire. I am desirous of obtaining from your majesty that which I cannot ask for myself. The vicomte thinks of marrying."

"He is still very young: but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man: I will choose a wife for him."

"He has already chosen one, sire, and only awaits your consent."

"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chosen a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own anticipations?"

Athos hesitated for a moment. "His affianced wife is of good birth, but has no fortune."

"That is a misfortune we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, sire; but your majesty will permit me to offer a remark."

"Do so, comte."

"Your majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage-portion to this young lady."

"Certainly."

"I should regret, sire, if the step I have taken towards your majesty should be attended by this result."

"No false delicacy, comte; what is the bride's name?"

"Mademoiselle La Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Athos, coldly.

"I seem to know that name," said the king, as if reflecting; "there was a Marquis de la Vallière."

"Yes, sire, it is his daughter."

"But he died, and his widow married again M. de St. Remy, I think, steward of the dowager madame's household."

"Your Majesty is correctly informed."

"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honor."

"Your majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the comte's anxious countenance, said: "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, comte."

"I am not quite sure," replied Athos.

"I have seen her, but she hardly struck me as being so."

"She seems to be a good and modest girl, but has little beauty, sire."

"Beautiful fair hair, however."

"I think so."

"And her blue eyes are tolerably good."

"Yes, sire,"

"With regard to beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question."

"Fifteen to twenty thousand francs dowry at the very outside, sire; the lovers are disinterested enough; for myself, I care little for money."

"For superfluity, you mean; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand francs, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency; I will do it for De Bragelonne." The king again remarked the coldness with which Athos received the remark.

"Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank," said Louis XIV.; "the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough; but there is that excellent St. Remy, who somewhat damages the credit of the family; and you, comte, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family."

"Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your majesty."

The king again paused. "A moment, comte. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of your conversation. You came to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, comte, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am ; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat, that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success."

"Well, sire, that is true."

"I do not understand you, then ; refuse."

"Nay, sire ; I love De Bragelonne with my whole heart ; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future ; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is objectionable to me, but I implore your majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy."

"Tell me, comte, is she in love with him ?"

"If your majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's affection ; the delight at being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may happen to have in her heart ; it is a marriage similar to many others which already exist at court ; but De Bragelonne wishes it, and so let it be."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who volunteer as stepping-stones for their children," said the king.

"I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering ; he is in great distress of mind ; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become gloomy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your majesty of the services he may be able to render."

"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, comte."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the comte, "to tell your majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."

"And I, too, as much as yourself, comte, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."

"I only await your majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before your majesty to receive your consent."

"You are mistaken, comte," said the king, firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, sire," exclaimed Athos, "your majesty has promised!"

"Not so, comte, I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."

"I appreciate your majesty's considerate and generous intentions in my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach you as an ambassador."

"An ambassador, comte, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."

"But, sire, it will be such a blow for De Bragelonne."

"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the vicomte."

"Love, sir, is overwhelming in its might."

"Love can be resisted, comte. I myself can assure you of that."

"When one has the soul of a king,—your own, for instance, sire."

"Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject. I have certain views for De Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not

wish him to marry so young; I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, comte, I wish them to wait."

"Yet once more, sire."

"Comte, you told me you came to request a favor."

"Assuredly, sire."

"Grant me one, then, instead; let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that, before long, war may be declared. I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man, or a father of a family. I should hesitate also, on De Bragelonne's account, to endow with a fortune, without some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy amongst my nobility." Athos bowed, and remained silent.

"Is that all you wished to ask me?" added Louis XIV.

"Absolutely all, sire; and I take my leave of your majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?"

"Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the vicomte that at my *levée* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, comte, to join my card-table."

"I am in traveling-costume, sire."

"A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, comte, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to men of your merit."

"Provided, sire, a monarch reigns grandly in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple." With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found De Bragelonne, who was awaiting him anxiously.

"Well, monsieur?" said the young man.

"The king, Raoul, is well intentioned towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed to our house."

"You have bad news to communicate to me, monsieur," said the young man, turning very pale.

"The king will himself inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"The king has not signed, however?"

"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for consideration. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience, than on the king's good feeling towards you."

Raoul, in utter consternation, on account of his knowledge of the count's frankness as well as his diplomacy, remained plunged in dull and gloomy stupor.

"Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I will follow you," he stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan!"

"Shall I show you his apartments?" said De Bragelonne.

"Do so."

"They are on the opposite staircase."

They altered their course, but on reaching the landing of the grand staircase, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, monsieur. My master heard of your return and wrote to you without delay; I have been looking for you for the last half-hour."

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, monsieur."

"Certainly."

"Dear Raoul," wrote the Comte de Guiche, "I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention; I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible."

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his grace, monsieur."

"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I shall leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I excuse you; adieu, Raoul; you will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, monsieur."

As soon as Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," it ran, "You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased; I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be good enough to come and see me; for I am told you have arrived from Blois."

"Your devoted

"VILLIERS, Duke of Buckingham."

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SWORD-THRUSTS IN THE WATER.

RAOUL, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger; they behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him; and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable; Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress. De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him sit down, saying, "How well you look!"

"That is singular," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."

"It is your case, then, Raoul, as it is my own,—our love affairs do not progress."

"So much the better, count, as far as *you* are concerned; the worst news would be good news."

"In that case do not distress yourself, for, not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see others about me who are happy."

"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul; "explain yourself."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling you saw dawn in me, increase and take entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and my own strength to my aid. I have well

weighed the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked; I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am aware, but it matters little, for *I* shall pursue my own course."

"This is madness, De Guiche! you cannot advance another step without risking your own ruin to-day, perhaps your life to-morrow."

"Whatever may happen, I have done with reflections: listen."

"And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?"

"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man and never abandons him till death."

"But, admitting that you obtain the happiness you covet, even then, you are more certainly lost than if you had failed in obtaining it."

"I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more; you could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand, I do not wish to be convinced; I have gone so far I cannot recede; I have suffered so much, death itself would be a boon. I no longer love to madness, Raoul, I am being engulfed by a whirlpool of jealousy."

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression resembling anger. "Well?" said he.

"Well or ill, matters little. This is what I claim from you, my friend, my almost brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gayety. On the first day, I dared not look at her; I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear her out of my sight; and she, Raoul—at least I thought I remarked it—she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine, a shadow intervened: another's smile invited hers. Beside her horse another's always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear another's caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for three days

past my brain has been on fire; flame, not blood, courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away, that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced.

"You wish Monsieur's death," exclaimed Raoul.

"No, no, I am not jealous of the husband; I am jealous of the lover."

"Of the *lover*?" said Raoul.

"Have you not observed it, you who were formerly so keen-sighted?"

"Are you jealous of the Duke of Buckingham?"

"To the very death."

"Again jealous?"

"This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter."

"It was you, then, who wrote to him?"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it, because he told me so. Look at this;" and he handed De Guiche the letter he had received nearly at the same moment as his own. De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, "He is a brave man, and more than that, a gallant man."

"Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in a similar style."

"He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf."

"But that is almost out of the question."

"What is?"

"That I shall call on him for that purpose."

"Why so?"

"The duke consults me as you do."

"I suppose you will give *me* the preference! Listen to me, Raoul, I wish you to tell his grace—it is a very simple matter—that to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I will meet him at Vincennes."

"Reflect, De Guiche."

"I thought I told you I have reflected."

"The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders his person inviolable. . . . Vincennes is close to the Bastile."

"The consequences concern *me*."

"But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?"

"Be perfectly easy on that score, he will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him. I implore you, therefore, seek the duke, and if it is necessary to entreat him to accept my offer, I will do so."

"That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now playing cards with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient."

"That is well arranged. I will take De Wardes to keep me in countenance."

"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can join us at any time; we can leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."

"He knows nothing?"

"Positively nothing. You continue still on an unfriendly footing, then?"

"Has he not told you anything?"

"Nothing."

"I do not like the man, and, as I *never* liked him, the result is, that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday."

"Let us go, then."

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais-Royal. As they were going along, Raoul was engaged in devising his scheme of action. The sole depositary of two secrets,

he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendancy he had acquired over De Guiche, and affairs did not look utterly hopeless. On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their own atmosphere, Raoul could not prevent himself for a moment forgetting De Guiche in order to seek out Louise, who, amidst her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. All its members were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his aristocratic carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some of the older courtiers remembered having seen his father, but their recollections were not prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him aloud about Belle-Isle, "I cannot speak to him at present," said Raoul.

"Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns."

"See, our deliverer approaches," said Raoul, perceiving D'Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the musketeers, had just made his entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D'Artagnan.

"The Comte de la Fère has been looking for you, chevalier," said Raoul.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "I have just left him."

"I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together."

"We have arranged to meet again."

As he answered Raoul, his absent looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle on its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D'Artagnan saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain's inquiring and haughty glance was aimed.

"Chevalier," said Raoul, "there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service."

"What is it, my dear vicomte?"

"It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I wish to say two words, and, as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for *me* to throw myself into the middle of the conversation."

"Ah, ah, is M. Fouquet there?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Do you not see him?"

"Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a greater right than you have?"

"You are a more important personage."

"Yes, you're right; I am captain of the musketeers; I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period, that I am always forgetting my dignity."

"You will do me this service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet—the deuce!"

"Are you not on good terms with him?"

"It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it must be done some day or another——"

"Stay; I think he is looking at you; or is it likely that it might be——"

"No, no; don't deceive yourself, it is indeed me for whom this honor is intended."

"The opportunity is a good one, then."

"Do you think so?"

"Pray go."

"Well, I will."

De Guiche had not removed his eyes from Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D'Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and civilly saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

"Good evening, M. d'Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle," said Fouquet, with that usage of society, and that perfect knowledge of the language of looks, which require half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons, notwithstanding all their study, never attain.

"Of Belle-Isle-en-Mer! Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"

"M. Fouquet has just told me that he had presented it to the king," said Buckingham.

"Do you know Belle-Isle, chevalier?" inquired Fouquet.

"I have only been there once," replied D'Artagnan, with readiness and good-humor.

"Did you remain there long?"

"Scarcely a day."

"Did you see much of it while you were there?"

"All that could be seen in a day."

"A great deal can be seen with observation as keen as yours," said Fouquet; at which D'Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. "M. Fouquet," said Buckingham, "I leave the captain with you, he is more learned than I am in bastions, scarps, and counter-scarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned me." Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the

queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together.

"Now, Raoul," said De Guiche, "there he is; be firm and quick."

Buckingham, having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The maneuver was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant, between the group of players and the gallery, where they walked, stopping now and then for the purpose of saying a few words to some of the graver courtiers who were walking there. At the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur who advanced toward the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips.

"My dear duke," said he, with the most affectionate politeness; "is it really true what I have just been told?"

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach, but had merely heard his voice. He started in spite of his command over himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. "Monseigneur," he asked, "what has been told you that surprises you so much?"

"That which throws me into despair, and will, in truth, be a real cause of mourning for the whole court."

"Your highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure."

"Precisely."

Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. "His departure," he murmured. "What does he say?"

Philip continued with the same gracious air, "I can easily conceive, monsieur, why the king of Great Britain.

recalls you ; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed we can let you go without great regret ; and I beg you to receive the expression of my own."

"Believe me, monseigneur," said the duke, "that if I quit the court of France——"

"Because you are recalled ; but, if you suppose the expression of my own wish on the subject might possibly have any influence with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer."

"I am overwhelmed, monseigneur, by so much kindness," replied Buckingham ; "but I have received positive commands. My residence in France was limited ; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago."

"Indeed," said Monsieur.

"Yes ; but," added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him,—“but I resemble that dweller in the East, who turned mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, but who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The court of France has its intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my lord ; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my residence, as your highness has so kindly invited me to do."

"When do you leave ?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.

"To-morrow, monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days."

The Duc d'Orléans made a movement of the head,

which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, duke, there is nothing to be said." Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile a contraction of his heart; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite direction. Raoul feared that the impatient young man might possibly make the proposition himself, and hurried forward before him.

"No, no, Raoul, all is useless now," said Guiche, holding both his hands toward the duke, and leading him behind a column. "Forgive me, duke, for what I wrote to you, I was mad; give me back my letter."

"It is true," said the duke, "you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."

"Forgive me, duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship is yours."

"There is certainly no reason why you should bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again."

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was now useless between the two young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces; a movement which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham. "A strategic retreat," said De Wardes.

"Why so?"

"Because the dear duke saves a sword thrust by it." At which reply both laughed.

Raoul, indignant, turned round frowningly, flushed with anger and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned on his heel, but De Wardes remained and waited.

"You will not break yourself of the habit," said Raoul

to De Wardes, "of insulting the absent; yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan, to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"You know very well, monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes was close to Raoul, their shoulders met, their faces approached, as if to mutually inflame each other by the fire of their looks and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of fury, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced."

They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who, with a smiling eye and a cheerful face, had just placed his hand on De Wardes' shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul abandoned to him.

"Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes." His smile immediately faded away, and his glance became cold and sharp as a sword.

"I am at your orders, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"For a very long time," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to-day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit, but you will perhaps have the goodness to accompany me to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery."

"I follow you, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.

"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

"That's well," said D'Artagnan; "but two persons are

not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust."

"Certainly," said the young man, who did not know what object D'Artagnan had in view. "As many as you please."

"Are they friends,"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Real friends?"

"No doubt of it."

"Very well, get a good supply, then. Do you come too Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham."

"What a disturbance," replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain slightly signed to him with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient, and then led the way to his apartments.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SWORD-THRUSTS IN THE WATER (CONCLUDED).

D'ARTAGNAN's apartment was not unoccupied; for the Comte de la Fère, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, as he saw him enter.

"Well," said the latter, "M. de Wardes has done me the honor to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends, as well as of ours." In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and, as he entered, glanced round the room, and perceiving the count, he went and placed himself by his side. D'Artagnan received

his visitors with all the courtesy he was capable of; he preserved his unmoved and unconcerned look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying posts of honor and credit at the court. After he had apologized to each of them for any inconvenience he might have put them to, he turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his customary self-command, could not prevent his face betraying some surprise mingled with not a little uneasiness.

"Now, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "since we are no longer within the precincts of the king's palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fère has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father."

"Perfectly true, monsieur, I have said so," replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with color.

"You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms."

"In the presence of witnesses?"

"Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honor."

"You do not appreciate my delicacy, monsieur. I have accused you, it is true; but I have kept the nature of the accusation a perfect secret. I entered into no details; but have rested satisfied by expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken the dis-

creetness I have shown into consideration, although you were interested in remaining silent. I can hardly recognize your habitual prudence in that, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, who was quietly biting the corner of his mustache, said, "I have already had the honor to beg you to state the particulars of the grievances you say you have against me."

"Aloud?"

"Certainly, aloud."

"In that case, I will speak."

"Speak, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "we are all listening to you."

"Well, monsieur, it is not a question of a personal injury towards myself, but one towards my father."

"That you have already stated."

"Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with hesitation."

"If that hesitation, in your case, really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it."

"Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?"

"Yes; in every and any case."

Those who were present at this scene had, at first, looked at each other with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that D'Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever.

De Wardes still maintained the same unbroken silence. "Speak, monsieur," said the musketeer; "you see you are keeping us waiting."

"Listen, then:—My father loved a lady of noble birth, and this lady loved my father." D'Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: "M. d'Artagnan found some letters which indicated a rendezvous, substituted himself, under disguise, for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness."

"That is perfectly true," said D'Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. "Yes, I was guilty of that dishonorable action. You should have added, monsieur, since you are so impartial, that, at the period when the circumstance which you have just related, happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age."

"Such an action is not the less shameful on that account," said De Wardes; "and it is quite sufficient for a gentleman to have attained the age of reason, to avoid committing an act of indelicacy."

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment, and almost of doubt.

"It was a most shameful deception, I admit," said D'Artagnan, "and I have not waited for M. de Wardes' reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly, too. Age has, however, made me more reasonable, and, above all, more upright; and this injury has been atoned for by a long and lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period, happily for yourselves, known to you by tradition only, at a period when love was not over scrupulous, when consciences did not distill, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting, or being attacked, our swords always in our hands, or at least ready to be drawn from their sheaths. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. I have repented of it, and more than that—I still repent it, M. de Wardes."

"I can well understand that, monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady's disgrace. She of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront you brought upon her, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her."

"Stay," said the Comte de la Fère, stretching his hand

towards De Wardes, with a peculiar smile upon his face, "you are mistaken; she was seen: and there are persons even now present, who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognize her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England."

"Married?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"So, you were not aware she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself. Do you happen to know she was usually styled 'My Lady,' without the addition of any name to that description?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Good heavens!" murmured Buckingham.

"Very well, monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d'Artagnan's life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d'Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was, that, when in England, this woman, by her seductions, completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord de Winter, by name Felton. You change color, my lord," said Athos turning to the Duke of Buckingham, "and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who this woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father's murderer."

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators.

"You see, M. de Wardes," said D'Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived as Athos spoke, "you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of any one's soul, and that the soul in question may fairly be considered to have

been altogether lost before my regret. It is, however, an act of conscience on my part. Now this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me to ask, with the greatest humility, your forgiveness for this shameless action, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father, if he were still alive, and if I had met him after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I."

"That is too much, M d'Artagnan," exclaimed many voices, with animation.

"No, gentlemen," said the captain. "And now, M. de Wardes, I hope all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me again. Do you consider it completely settled?"

De Wardes bowed, and muttered to himself inarticulately.

"I trust also," said D'Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, "that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as it seems you have the unfortunate habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it happened, will allow me to ask whether you, who advocate such excessive purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or the principle of honor. And now, listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale, with which your name may be associated, reaches my ear."

"Monsieur," said De Wardes, "it is useless threatening to no purpose."

"I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes; and you must listen to me still further." The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer. "You spoke just now of the honor of a woman, and of the honor of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and

rectitude, and which did not exist, it seems, in *our* minds, lives in our children; and it is delightful too, to see a young man, at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honor of women, respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lips and clenched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the commencement of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate.

"How did it happen, then, that you allowed yourself to say to M. Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eye flashed, as, darting forward, he exclaimed,—"Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" At which exclamation, a smile, full of malice, passed across De Wardes' face.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying,—“Do not interrupt me, young man.” And looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued:—“I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honor, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honor. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M. de Wardes. What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man, in offending his father and mother at the same time?”

“It seems to me,” returned De Wardes, “that liberty of speech is allowed, when it is supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal.”

“Tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression.”

“The sword.”

“You fail, not only in logic, in your argument, but in religion and honor. You expose the lives of many others,

without referring to your own, which seems to be full of hazard. Besides, fashions pass away, monsieur, and the fashion of dueling has passed away, without referring in any way to the edicts of his majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once apologize to M. de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed, not in his heart alone, but still more, in every action of his life. You will do and say this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did and said just now to your boy's mustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.

"In that case the result will be——"

"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing; "the result will be that your conciliatory address will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."

"Not so," said the captain, "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"

"The result will be, that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services, dating from a period when you were not born, and who, at my request, has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastile; and I shall say to the king,—‘Sire, a man has in a most cowardly way insulted M. de Bragelonne by insulting his mother; I have written this man’s name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. De Wardes is in the Bastile for three years.’” And D’Artagnan, drawing the order signed by the king from his pocket, held it towards De Wardes.

Remarking that the young man was not quite convinced, and received the warning as an idle threat, he

shrugged his shoulders, and walked leisurely towards the table, upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have terrified the topographical Porthos. De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastile, even at that period, was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and, in an almost unintelligible voice, said,—“I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d’Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you.”

“One moment, monsieur,” said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity, “you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, ‘and which I am forced to make;’ I said, ‘and which my conscience induces me to make.’ This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments.”

“I subscribe to it,” said De Wardes; “but submit, gentlemen, that a thrust of a sword through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this.”

“No, monsieur,” replied Buckingham; “for the sword thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong; it only showed that he was more or less skillful in the use of the weapon.”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed De Wardes.

“There now,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering you a service by stopping you in time.”

“Is that all, monsieur?” inquired De Wardes.

“Absolutely everything,” replied D’Artagnan; “and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you.”

“Believe me, monsieur, that your reconciliations are not successful.”

"In what way?"

"Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever."

"You are deceived, monsieur, as far as I am concerned," returned Raoul; "for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you."

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes. He cast his eyes around him like a man bewildered. D'Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation; and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. "Oh!" exclaimed the young man, abandoning himself to the rage which consumed him, "can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?"

"You can, monsieur, for I am here," whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who, having probably remained behind with that intention, had just approached him. "You, monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Yes, I! I am no subject of the king of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage, that I, too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d'Artagnan's principles profoundly, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and, in my turn, I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, are so terribly incensed, take me as a remedy. In thirty-four hours' time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter if together, than if alone. We will fight, when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the

rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the day, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six."

"I accept willingly," said De Wardes.

"I assure you," said the duke, "that if you kill me, you will be rendering me an infinite service."

"I will do my utmost to make myself agreeable to you, duke," said De Wardes.

"It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?"

"I shall be at your commands. I needed some real danger and some mortal risk to run, to tranquilize me."

"In that case, I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning, my valet will tell you the exact hour of our departure; we can travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can. Adieu."

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned towards the king's apartments: De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais-Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

CHAPTER XL.

BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN.

AFTER the austere lesson administered to De Wardes, Athos and D'Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais-Royal. "You perceive," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes, for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked."

"I know such fellows well," replied D'Artagnan: "I had an affair with the father. I assure you that, although

at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage—I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him. Ah, Athos, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest, a hand like quicksilver,—you knew its quality, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer a piece of steel; it was a serpent that assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head; in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half a dozen paces, then three, and then, body to body, I pressed my antagonist closely, then I darted back again ten paces. No human power could resist that ferocious ardor. Well, De Wardes, the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, occupied a good deal of my time; and my fingers, at the end of the engagement, were, I well remember, tired enough.”

“It is, then, as I said,” resumed Athos, “the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for.”

“Agreed; but Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes,—he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king will not be able to get out of temper about the matter; besides we shall know how to pacify his majesty. But why so full of these fears and anxieties? you don’t easily get alarmed.”

“I will tell you what makes me anxious: Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper, and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode.”

“We will prevent the explosion.”

"Not I," said Athos, "for I must return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, sicken me. I am no longer a young man who can make terms with the meannesses of the day. I have read in the Great Book many things too beautiful and too comprehensive, to longer take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In one word, I am weary of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you with me always, I wish to return to Blois."

"How wrong you are, Athos; how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your noble nature. Men of your stamp are created to continue, to the very last moment, in full possession of their great faculties. Look at my sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at Rochelle; it served me for thirty years without fail; one day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor on the Louvre and was broken. I had a hunting knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; Monsieur Fouquet will not last as long as my Spanish blade."

"Is it possible," said Athos, smiling, "that my friend D'Artagnan, who, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have more exalted ambition, D'Artagnan. To be a minister—to be a slave, never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard you occasionally call me 'the great Athos;' I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no; I do not yield myself in this manner."

"We will not speak of it any more, then;—renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us."

"It is almost cruel what you say."

D'Artagnan pressed Athos's hand warmly. "No, no; renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you. I am at Paris."

"In that case I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again."

"You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?"

"Grimaud takes his rest now; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; for if, in retracing the forty leagues which separate us from Blois, he needed to draw breath even, he would die without a murmur. But I don't want to lose Grimaud."

"You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. *Holà!* some one there," called out D'Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade—the heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared—"I wish some gentleman who is so disposed, to escort the Comte de la Fère," cried D'Artagnan.

"Thank you for your readiness, gentlemen," said Athos; "I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner."

"I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fère," said some one, "if I had not to speak to Monsieur D'Artagnan."

"Who is that?" said D'Artagnan, looking into the darkness.

"I, Monsieur D'Artagnan."

"Heaven forgive me, if that is not Monsieur Baise-meaux's voice."

"It is, monsieur."

"What are you doing in the courtyard, my dear Baise-meaux?"

"I am waiting your orders, my dear Monsieur D'Artagnan."

"Wretch that I am," thought D'Artagnan; "true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?"

"I came because I had occasion to speak to you."

"You did not send to me?"

"I waited until you were disengaged," said Monsieur Baisemeaux, timidly.

"I leave you, D'Artagnan," said Athos.

"Not before I have presented Monsieur Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastile."

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other.

"Surely you must know each other," said D'Artagnan.

"I have an indistinct recollection of Monsieur Baisemeaux," said Athos.

"You remember, my dear Baisemeaux, the king's guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal's time."

"Perfectly," said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Fère, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos," whispered D'Artagnan to Baisemeaux.

"Yes, yes, a brave man, one of the celebrated four."

"Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?"

"If you please?"

"In the first place, as for the orders—there are none. The king does not intend to arrest the person in question."

"So much the worse," said Baisemeaux with a sigh.

"What do you mean by so much the worse?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, laughing.

"No doubt of it," returned the governor, "my prisoners are my income."

"I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light."

"And so there are no orders," repeated Baisemeaux with a sigh. "What an admirable situation yours is, captain," he continued, after a pause, "captain-lieutenant of the musketeers."

"Oh, it is good enough; but I don't see why you should envy me; you, governor of the Bastile, the first castle in France."

"I am well aware of that," said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

"You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours."

"Don't speak of profits to me if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish of mind."

"Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself, you whose business it is to arrest others?"

"I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favor."

"Baisemeaux, you seem to forget we are acquaintances of five and thirty years standing. Don't assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable; I don't eat governors of the Bastile raw."

"Heaven be praised!"

"Come into the courtyard with me; it's a beautiful moonlight night; we will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your pitiful tale." He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and, in his rough, good-humored way, cried:—"Out with it, rattle away, Baisemeaux; what have you got to say?"

"It's a long story."

"You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I'll wager you are

making fifty thousand francs out of your pigeons in the Bastile."

"Would to heaven that were the case, M. D'Artagnan."

"You surprise me, Baisemeaux; just look at you, acting the anchorite. I should like to show you your face in a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would hardly look fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken."

"All quite true."

"Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand francs profit you make;" at which remark Baisemeaux stamped on the ground."

"Well, well," said D'Artagnan, "I will add up your accounts for you: you were captain of M. Mazarin's guards; and 12,000 francs a year would in twelve years amount to 140,000 francs."

"Twelve thousand francs! Are you mad!" cried Baisemeaux; "the old miser gave me no more than 6,000, and the expenses of the post amounted to 6,500 francs. M. Colbert, who deducted the other 6,000 francs, condescended to allow me to take fifty pistoles as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in 12,000 francs a year, I could not have met my engagements."

"Well, then, how about the 50,000 francs from the Bastile? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your 6,000 francs salary besides."

"Admitted!"

"Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who, on an average, bring you in a thousand francs a year each."

"I don't deny it."

"Well, there is at once an income of 50,000 francs; you

have held the post three years, and must have received in that time 150,000 francs."

"You forget one circumstance, dear M. D'Artagnan."

"What is that?"

"That while you received your appointment as captain from the king himself, I received mine as governor from Messrs. Tremblay and Louvière."

"Quite right, and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing."

"Nor Louvière either: the result was, that I gave 75,000 francs to Tremblay as his share."

"Very agreeable that! and to Louvière?"

"The very same."

"Money down?"

"No: that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two gentlemen, who had sprung from the barricades; he permitted them, therefore to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement."

"What were those conditions?"

"Tremble . . . three years' income for the good-will."

"The deuce! so that the 150,000 francs have passed into their hands."

"Precisely so."

"And beyond that?"

"A sum of 150,000 francs, or 15,000 pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments."

"Exorbitant."

"Yes, but that is not all."

"What besides?"

"In default of the fulfillment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that."

"It is monstrous, incredible!"

"Such is the fact, however."

"I do indeed pity you, Baisemeaux. But why, in the name of fortune, did M. Mazarin grant you this pretended favor? It would have been far better to have refused you altogether."

"Certainly, but he was strongly persuaded to do so by my protector."

"Who is he?"

"One of your own friends, indeed; M. d'Herblay."

"M. d'Herblay! Aramis!"

"Just so; he has been very kind towards me."

"Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain."

"Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal's service. M. d'Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louvière and Tremblay—they objected; I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d'Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for the different payments."

"You astound me! Aramis become your surety?"

"Like a man of honor; he procured the signature; Tremblay and Louvière resigned their appointments; I have paid every year 25,000 francs to these two gentlemen; on the 31st of May, every year, M. d'Herblay himself comes to the Bastille, and brings me 5,000 pistoles to distribute between my crocodiles."

"You owe Aramis 150,000 francs, then?"

"That is the very thing which is the cause of my despair, for I only owe him 100,000."

"I don't quite understand you."

"He came and settled with the vampires only two years. To-day, however, is the 31st of May, and he has not been yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if, therefore, I don't pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain; I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have

worked for three years, and given 250,000 francs for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"This is very strange," murmured D'Artagnan.

"You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead ; can you not ?"

"Yes, indeed !"

"And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that my eyes will be left me only to weep with."

"It is really a very grievous affair."

"I have come to you, M. d'Artagnan, for you are the only man who can get me out of my trouble."

"In what way ?"

"You are acquainted with the Abbé d'Herblay, and you know that he is a somewhat mysterious gentleman."

"Yes."

"Well, you can, perhaps, give me the address of his presbytery, for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there."

"I should think not, indeed. He is Bishop of Vannes."

"What! Vannes in Bretagne ?"

"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, "How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow. I am a lost man."

"Your despair quite distresses me."

"Vannes, Vannes," cried Baisemeaux.

"But, listen ; a bishop is not always a resident. M. d'Herblay may not possibly be so far away as you fear."

"Pray, tell me his address."

"I really don't know it."

"In that case, I am lost. I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But, Baisemeaux, I can hardly believe what you tell me; besides, since the Bastille is capable of producing 50,000 francs a year, why have you not tried to screw 100,000 out of it?"

"Because I am an honest man, M. d'Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like ambassadors."

"Well, you're in a fair way to get out of your difficulties; give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your excellent living, and put yourself out of the way between this and midday to-morrow."

"How can you be hard-hearted enough to laugh?"

"Nay, you really afflict me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honor, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you."

"Never, never!"

"You wish to put your hand on Aramis?"

"At any cost!"

"Well, go and see where M. Fouquet is."

"Why, what connection can there be——"

"How stupid you are! Don't you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or Belle-Isle in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d'Herblay to that bishopric!"

"I see, I see; you restore me to life again."

"So much the better. Go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Of course, of course," exclaimed Baisemeaux, delightedly.

"But," said D'Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, "your word of honor?"

"I give you my sacred word of honor," replied the little man, about to set off running.

"Where are you going?"

"To M. Fouquet's house."

"It is useless doing that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning."

"I will do so. Thank you."

"Good luck attend you," said D'Artagnan.

"Thank you."

"This is a strange affair," murmured D'Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. "What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or another."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE KING'S CARD-TABLE

FOUQUET was present, as D'Artagnan had said, at the king's card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham's departure had shed a balm on the lacerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Count de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing, conversed with him upon the circumstance of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful, and kind in his manner, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless affection at Madame. The princess, in the midst of her elation of spirits, divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice: for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remem-

brance, no longer a man. Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little calculations of selfish comfort. Madame had received Buckingham's smiles and attentions and sighs, while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the Channel, which toss mighty vessels to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not fail to mark this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt. Of a sensitive character, proud and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which such a passion had entered his heart. The looks he cast, from time to time, at Madame, became colder by degrees at the chilling complexion of his thoughts. He could hardly yet despair, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she redoubled her activity to regain the ray of light she was about to lose: her timid and indecisive mind was displayed in brilliant flashes of wit and humor. At any cost, she felt that she must be remarked above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so, for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened, and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henrietta, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV. The king, jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of those who surrounded him, could not resist admitting himself vanquished by a petulance so thoroughly French in its nature, whose energy was more than ever increased by English

humor. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit made still more dazzling. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Wit and humor escaped from her scarlet lips, like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, subdued by her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time, that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world, like people who merited their appellation of the wittiest and most polished people in Europe.

Madame, from that evening, achieved and enjoyed a success capable of bewildering all not born to those altitudes termed thrones; which, in spite of their elevation, are sheltered from such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as a person to be recognized. Buckingham regarded her as a *coquette* deserving the cruellest tortures, and De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity; the courtiers as a star whose light might some day become the focus of all favor and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years previously, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly girl" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this *coquette* "on both knees"—De Guiche had once looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to disgust the monarch whom such a dull star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth, and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king, and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer, like all women, and imperious, like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and acquiesced in it immediately, a circumstance which induced the young queen to raise the siege and retire to her apartments. The king hardly paid any attention to

her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Encouraged by the rules of etiquette, which he had begun to introduce at the court as an element of every relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother, and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked, that at the threshold of the door, his majesty, freed from every restraint, or not equal to the situation, sighed very deeply. The ladies present—for nothing escapes a woman's glance—Mademoiselle Montalais, for instance—did not fail to say to each other, “the king sighed,” and “Madame sighed too.” This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment very far more dangerous for the king's repose. Madame had sighed, first closing her beautiful black eyes, next opening them, and then, laden, as they were, with an indescribable mournfulness of expression, she had raised them towards the king, whose face at that moment visibly heightened in color. The consequence of these blushes, of these interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation, was, that Montalais had committed an indiscretion, which had certainly affected her companion, for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, less clear-sighted, perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed; and her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess without thinking of taking the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that this young country girl might allege as her excuse the agitation into which the king seemed to be thrown, for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backwards, had his face towards it. The king returned to the room where the card-tables were set out. He wished to speak to the dif-

ferent persons there, but it was easy to see that his mind was absent. He jumbled different accounts together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained those habits since the time of Monsieur Mazarin—who had a poor memory, but was a good calculator. In this way, Monsieur Manicamp, with a thoughtless and absent air,—for Monsieur Manicamp was the honestest man in the world, appropriated 20,000 francs, which were littering the table, and which did not seem to belong to any person in particular. In the same way, Monsieur de Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, somehow forgot to leave behind him the sixty double louis which he had won for the Duke of Buckingham, and which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left lying on the table before him. The king only recovered his attention in some degree at the moment that Monsieur Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and, doubtless, with great respect, yet with much perseverance, whispered a counsel of some sort into the still tingling ears of the king. The king, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention, and immediately looking around him, said, "Is Monsieur Fouquet no longer here?"

"Yes, sire, I am here," replied the superintendent, till then engaged with Buckingham, and approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet negligent air. "Forgive me," said Louis, "if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention wherever I may require your services."

"I am always at the king's service," replied Fouquet.

"And your cash-box too," said the king, laughing with a false smile.

"My cash-box more than anything else," said Fouquet, coldly.

"The fact is, I wish to give a *fête* at Fontainebleau—to keep open house for fifteen days, and I shall require——" and he stopped, glancing at Colbert. Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert's icy smile, "Four million francs."

"Four million," repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. And his nails, buried in his bosom, were thrust into his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remaining unaltered. "When will they be required, sire?"

"Take your time,—I mean—no, no; as soon as possible."

"A certain time will be necessary, sire."

"Time!" exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly.

"The time, monsieur," said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, "simply to *count the money*; a million can only be drawn and weighed in a day."

"Four days then," said Colbert.

"My clerks," replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "will perform wonders on his majesty's service, and the sum shall be ready in three days."

It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friendship—an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for, in reality, he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen that clothed his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best of humors: the result of their discernment was, that his orders were executed with that exactitude of maneuver which is found on board a man-of-war, commanded during a storm by an ill-tem-

pered captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along—it flew. Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive ; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably off a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a perfect heap of cray-fish ; he then directed his body to be anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old ; and when this anointment was completed, he had himself wrapped in flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing-gown, he wrote letter after letter in that fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume. The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, anxious. Aramis looked up : “ Good-evening,” said he ; and his searching look detected his host’s sadness and disordered state of mind. “ Was your play as good as his majesty’s ? ” asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and then pointed to the door to the servant who had followed him ; when the servant had left he said, “ Excellent.”

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. “ You have lost as usual ? ” inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.

“ Even more than usual,” replied Fouquet.

“ You know how to support losses.”

“ Sometimes.”

“ What, Monsieur Fouquet a bad player ! ”

“ There is play and play, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“ How much have you lost ? ” inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, and then, without

the slightest emotion, said, "The evening has cost me four millions," and a bitter laugh drowned the last vibration of these words.

Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. "Four millions," he said; "you have lost four millions,—impossible!"

"Monsieur Colbert held my cards for me," replied the superintendent, with a similar bitter laugh.

"Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?"

"Yes, and from the king's own lips. It was impossible to ruin a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?"

"It is clear that your destruction is the object in view."

"That is your opinion?"

"Still. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along."

"Yes; but I did not expect four millions."

"No doubt the amount is serious, but, after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is Monsieur Fouquet."

"My dear D'Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers, you would be less easy."

"And you promised?"

"What could I *do*?"

"That's true."

"The very day I refuse, Colbert will procure the money; whence I know not, but he *will* procure it: and I shall be lost."

"There is no doubt of that. In how many days did you promise these four millions?"

"In three days. The king seemed exceedingly pressed."

"*In three days?*"

"When I think," resumed Fouquet, "that just now,

as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, 'There is the rich Monsieur Fouquet,' it is enough to turn my brain."

"Stay, monsieur, the matter is not worth so much trouble," said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written."

"Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy."

"There is only one remedy for you,—pay."

"But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted; Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid; and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? When kings have tasted money, they are like tigers who have tasted flesh, they devour everything. The day will arrive—*must* arrive—when I shall have to say, 'Impossible, sire,' and on that very day I am a lost man."

Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying,

"A man in your position, my lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so."

"A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to struggle against a king."

"Nonsense; when I was young I wrestled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was king of France,—nay more—cardinal."

"Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle."

"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention, and when you think all is lost, something will be discovered which will retrieve everything."

"Who will discover this wonderful something?"

"Yourself."

"I! I resign my office of inventor."

"Then I will."

"Be it so. But set to work without delay."

"Oh! we have time enough!"

"You kill me, D'Herblay, with your calmness," said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his face.

"Do you not remember that I one day told you not to make yourself uneasy, if you possessed courage. *Have* you any?"

"I believe so."

"Then don't make yourself uneasy."

"It is decided then, that, at the last moment, you will come to my assistance."

"It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you."

"It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D'Herblay."

"If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is the virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion, do you act, monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we will see what is to be done."

"We shall see, then, in a very short time."

"Very well. However, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I was myself about to ask you for some."

"For yourself?"

"For myself, or some of my people, for mine or for ours."

"How much do you want?"

"Be easy on that score; a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."

"Fifty thousand francs."

"Oh! a mere nothing. Of course one has always 50,000 francs. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are—and I should give myself

far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?"

"To-morrow morning; but you wish to know its destination."

"Nay, nay, chevalier, I need no explanation."

"To-morrow is the first of June."

"Well?"

"One of our bonds becomes due."

"I did not know we had any bonds."

"Certainly, to-morrow we pay our last third instalment."

"What third?"

"Of the 150,000 francs to Baisemeaux."

"Baisemeaux? Who is he?"

"The governor of the Bastile."

"Yes, I remember. On what grounds am I to pay 150,000 francs for that man?"

"On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louvière and Tremblay."

"I have a very vague recollection of the matter."

"That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to. However, I do not believe you have any affair in the world of greater importance than this one."

"Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment."

"Why, in order to render him a service in the first place, and afterwards ourselves."

"Ourselves? You are joking."

"Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastile may prove a very excellent acquaintance."

"I have not the good fortune to understand you, D'Herblay."

"Monseigneur, we had our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we needed our own governor of the Bastile."

"Do you think so?"

"Let us not deceive ourselves, monseigneur; we are

very much opposed to paying the Bastile a visit," added the prelate, displaying, beneath his pale lips, teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so much admired thirty years previously by Marie Michon.

"And you think it is not too much to pay 150,000 francs for that? I thought you generally put out money at better interest than that."

"The day will come when you will admit your mistake."

"My dear D'Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastile, he is no longer protected by his past."

"Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular; besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier's heart. I am certain, my lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgments."

"It is a strange affair! usury in a matter of benevolence."

"Do not mix yourself up with it, monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practice it, and both of us reap the advantage from it—that is all."

"Some intrigue, D'Herblay?"

"I do not deny it."

"And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?"

"Why not?—there are worse accomplices than he? May I depend, then, upon the 5,000 pistoles to-morrow?"

"Do you want them this evening?"

"It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has become of me, and must be upon thorns."

You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D'Herblay, the interest of your 150,000 francs will never pay my four millions for me."

"Why not, monseigneur?"

"Good-night, I have business to transact with my clerks before I retire."

"A good night's rest, monseigneur."

"D'Herblay, you wish things that are impossible."

"Shall I have my 50,000 francs this evening?"

"Yes."

"Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety—it is I who tell you to do so."

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head, and heaving a sigh.

CHAPTER XLII.

M. BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN'S ACCOUNTS.

THE clock of St. Paul was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, that is to say, in colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him, except a kind of hunting-knife by his side, passed before the Rue du Petit-Muse, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastille. Two sentinels were on duty at the gate; they made no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about being entered upon. The sentinel at the outer guard-house stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained, with his usual politeness, that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at

the grating, and inspected the new arrival most attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor; whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard and who, in turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name. "I cannot tell it you, monsieur," said Aramis; "I need only mention, that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor, that I can only rely beforehand upon one thing, that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the 1st of June, I am convinced he will hasten here himself." The officer could not possibly believe that a man of the governor's importance should put himself out for a person of so little importance as the citizen-looking visitor on horseback. "It happens most fortunately, monsieur," he said, "that the governor is just going out, and you can perceive his carriage, with the horses already harnessed, in the courtyard yonder; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by." Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as with a suspected stranger; the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of

obedience to orders; so that, in this way, the sentinel could convince himself that no one quitted the Bastille improperly. The carriage rolled along under the archway, but at the moment the iron-gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had been again stopped, and said something to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the door-way, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He immediately uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He almost embraced him. "What a difficult matter to enter the Bastille!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills, as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, my lord. How delighted I am to see your grace."

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

"Pray excuse me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux.

"No, no," said Aramis, "I have 5,000 pistoles in the saddle-bags."

The governor's countenance became so radiant, that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the blood royal had arrived. "Yes, you are right, the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay, and it shall take us back to my house."

"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard! do you believe I am so great an invalid? No, no, we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner

at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bleak bare walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule, and a staircase of white stone led to the governor's apartments, who crossed the antechamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small side-door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. Baisemeaux installed the prelate with that all-inclusive politeness of which a good man, or a grateful man, alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him, on which to rest his hand, everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with much solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with the most respectful devotion; and the soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked steadfastly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further.

"Well, my lord," he said, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

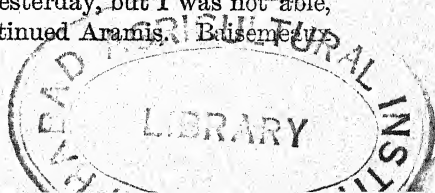
"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, it is a duty as well."

"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but what you have with me is not of that character, it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come, confess, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."

"About your health, I certainly have," stammered out Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able, as I was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux



anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."

"You are really very kind, my lord."

"And it was a good thing for me I was punctual, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, you were going out." At which latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, "It is true I was going out."

"Then I prevent you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glance upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."

"How can your lordship imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?"

"Confess you were going in search of money."

"No," stammered out Baisemeaux, "no! I assure you I was going to——"

"Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet," suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. "No, no," he exclaimed in a state of desperation, "who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? are you drunk below there? why am I interrupted when I am engaged on business?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, biting his lips, "to M. Fouquet, the abbé, or the superintendent?"

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. "To the superintendent," he said.

"It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to a person who gives it away!"

"I assure you, my lord——"

"You were afraid?"

"My dear lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found."

"You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet's, for he is a man whose hand is always open."

"I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address."

"To ask M. Fouquet for my address?" exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

"Yes," said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him,—“at M. Fouquet's certainly."

"There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux, only I would ask, why ask my address of M. Fouquet?"

"That I might write to you."

"I understand," said Aramis smiling, "but that is not what I meant; I do not ask you what you required my address for: I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?"

"Oh!" said Baisemeaux, "as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes——"

"But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you know I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address."

"Well, monsieur," said Baisemeaux, completely at bay, "if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely."

"Nonsense," observed Aramis, calmly: "how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?" And while he composed his face, and continued to smile cheerfully on the governor, he was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, knew, however, that Vannes was his residence. "I shall clear all this up," he said to

himself; and then speaking aloud, added, "Well, my dear governor, shall we now arrange our little accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my lord; but tell me beforehand, my lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?"

"Very willingly, indeed."

"That's well," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

"What does that mean?" inquired Aramis.

"That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly."

"And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think you are acting ceremoniously with me."

"No, indeed. Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can."

"But why so?"

"Because not even a prince could have done what you have done for me."

"Nonsense! nonsense!"

"Nay, I assure you——"

"Let us speak of other matters," said Aramis. "Or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on?"

"Not over well."

"The deuce!"

"M. de Mazarin was not hard enough."

"Yes, I see; you require a government full of suspicion—like that of the old cardinal, for instance."

"Yes; matters went on better under him. The brother of his 'gray eminence' made his fortune here."

"Believe me, my dear governor," said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvière and Tremblay?"

"Most certainly I have."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand francs I have brought with me?"

"Nothing."

"Have you not saved anything, then?"

"My lord, in giving the fifty thousand francs of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I give them everything I gain. I told M. D'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but became immediately afterwards as unmoved as before; "so you have seen my old friend D'Artagnan; how was he?"

"Wonderfully well."

"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness; "I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Sixty."

"Well, that is a tolerably round number."

"In former times, my lord, there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."

"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."

"Perhaps not; for, to anybody but myself, each prisoner would bring in two hundred and fifty pistoles; for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty francs a day."

"Only you have no prince of the blood; at least, I suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank heaven!—I mean, no, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by unfortunately?"

"Because my appointment would be improved by it. So, fifty francs per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a *maréchal* of France——"

"But you have as many *maréchals* of France, I suppose, as you have princes of the blood!"

"Alas! no more. It is true *lieutenant-generals* and *brigadiers* pay twenty-six francs, and I have two of them. After that, come *councilors* of parliament, who bring me fifteen francs, and I have six of them."

"I did not know," said Aramis, "that *councilors* were so productive."

"Yes; but from fifteen francs I sink at once to ten francs; namely, for an ordinary judge, and for an ecclesiastic."

"And you have seven, you say; an excellent affair."

"Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some good, at all events, otherwise than as a *councilor* of parliament?"

"Yes, you are right; I do not see five francs difference between them."

"You understand; if I have a fine fish, I pay four or five francs for it; if I get a fine fowl, it costs me a franc and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the army of rats that infest this place."

"Why not get half a dozen cats to deal with them?"

"Cats indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some *terrier* dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. These dogs unfortunately, have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill."

Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought—Aramis was meditating.

"I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a good-

sized fowl costs me a franc and a half, and that a fine fish costs me four or five francs. Three meals are served at the Bastille, and, as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-franc man costs me seven francs and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten francs like those at fifteen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! Then you gain seven francs and a half upon those who pay you fifteen francs."

"I *must* compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw how he had been snapped up.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten francs?"

"Oh, yes! we have citizens, and barristers at five francs."

"And do they eat, too?"

"Not a doubt about it; only you understand that they do not get fish or poultry, nor rich wines at every meal; but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish at their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."

"No; understand me; when the fifteen francs has not eaten his fowl, or the ten francs has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-franc prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."

"And what do you make out of your five-franc prisoners?"

"A franc and a half."

"Baisemeaux, you're an honest fellow; in honest truth I say so."

"Thank you, my lord. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs' clerks, who are rated at three

francs. They do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon."

"But do not the five-franc gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?"

"Oh! my lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that; I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of a red partridge, a slice of venison, or a slice of a truffled pasty, dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams; these are the leavings of the twenty-four-franc prisoners; and as he eats and drinks, at dessert he cries 'Long live the King,' and blesses the Bastille; with a couple of bottles of champagne, which costs me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked, and it does me infinite honor, that certain prisoners, who have been set at liberty, have, almost immediately afterwards, got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, unless it be to enjoy the pleasures of my kitchen? It is really the fact."

Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

"You smile," said Baisemeaux.

"I do," returned Aramis.

"I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years."

"I must see it before I believe it," said Aramis.

"Well, I can show it to you, although it is prohibited to communicate the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes——"

"I should be delighted, I confess."

"Very well," said Baisemeaux, and he took out of a cupboard a large register. Aramis followed him most anxiously with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, and turned over the leaves for a minute, and staid at the letter M.

"Look here," said he, "Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661. Mazarinades, etc.; you understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastille for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here."

"And what was his object?"

"None other than to return to my kitchen at three francs a day."

"Three francs—poor devil!"

"The poet, my lord, belongs to the lowest scale, the same style of board as the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk; but I repeat it is to those people only that I give these little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read the names, but without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

"In 1661, you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"

"Yes, a poor devil of a student, who made—What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?"

"A distich."

"Yes; that is it."

"Poor fellow; for a distich."

"Do you know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"

"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe."

"Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."

"Yes, I did so."

"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my lord,

I have treated him since that time as a prisoner at fifteen francs."

"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued turning over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed Martinier.

"Yes, the same as that one."

"Is that Marchiali an Italian?" said Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

"Hush!" said Baisemeaux.

"Why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clenching his white hand.

"I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali."

"No, it is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced."

"That may be, but perhaps I have spoken to you about him without naming him."

"Is he an old offender?" asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

"On the contrary, he is quite young."

"Is his crime, then, very heinous?"

"Unpardonable."

"Has he assassinated any one?"

"Bah!"

"An incendiary, then?"

"Bah!"

"Has he slandered any one?"

"No, no! It is he who——" and Baisemeaux approached Aramis's ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered, "It is he who presumes to resemble the——"

"Yes, yes," said Aramis, "I now remember you already spoke about it last year to me; but the crime appeared to me so slight."

"Slight, do you say?"

"Or rather, so involuntary."

"My lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected."

"Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "if I am not mistaken, we are summoned."

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket. "Will it be agreeable to your lordship to breakfast now?" said he; "for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced."

"Assuredly, my dear governor," and they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BREAKFAST AT MONSIEUR DE BAISEMEAUX'S.

ARAMIS was generally temperate; but on this occasion, while taking every care of his constitution, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which, in all respects, was most excellent. The latter, on his side, was animated with the wildest gayety; the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, seemed to open his heart. Every now and then he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude; while the latter, leaning back in his chair, took a few sips of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear any ill words against the fare of the Bastile," said he, half-closing his eyes; "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of such Burgundy every day."

"All those at fifteen francs drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student, Seldon, drink such good wine?"

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I heard you say he was boarded at fifteen francs."

"He! no, indeed; a man who makes districts—distichs I mean—at fifteen francs. No, no! it is his neighbor who is at fifteen francs."

"Which neighbor?"

"The other, second Bertaudière."

"Excuse me, my dear governor; but you speak a language which requires quite an apprenticeship to understand."

"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain:—second Bertaudière is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudière."

"So that Bertaudière is the name of one of the towers of the Bastille? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?"

"Look," said Baisemeaux, going to the window. "It is that tower to the left—the second one."

"Is the prisoner at fifteen francs there?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Seven or eight years, nearly."

"What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?"

"It was not in my time, M. d'Herblay."

"But I should have thought that Louvière or Tremblay would have told you."

"The secrets of the Bastille are never handed over with the keys of the governorship."

"Indeed! Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery—a state secret."

"Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a state secret, but a secret—like everything else that happens at the Bastile."

"But," said Aramis, "why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of second Bertaudière?"

"Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles——"

"Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?"

"Of course."

"The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?"

"They are *always* telling them that; it is a matter of course; the same song over and over again."

"But does not the resemblance you were speaking about just now strike the turnkeys?"

"My dear M. d'Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court, as you are, to take trouble about such matters."

"You're right, you're right, my dear M. Baisemeaux. Let me give you another taste of this Volnay."

"Not a taste merely, a full glass; fill yours, too."

"Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A taste for me; a glass for yourself."

"As you please." And Aramis and the governor nodded to each other, as they drank their wine. "But," said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby-colored wine he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses at the same moment, "but what you might call a resemblance, another would not, perhaps, take any notice of."

"Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles."

"I really think, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own creation."

"Upon my honor, it is not so."

"Stay," continued Aramis. "I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it."

"Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one, and, if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so."

"If I were to see him, indeed," said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; "but in all probability I never shall."

"Why not?"

"Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy I was buried there forever."

"No, no; the cells are very good places to live in."

"I really do not, and cannot believe it, and that is a fact."

"Pray do not speak ill of second Bertaudière. It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best lodging the Bastille affords has been his. There is a chance for you."

"Nay, nay," said Aramis, coldly; "you will never make me believe there are any good rooms in the Bastille; and, as for your carpets they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads, too."

"Toads?" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, in the dungeons."

"Ah! I don't say there are not toads in the dungeons," replied Baisemeaux. "But—will you be convinced by your own eyes?" he continued, with a sudden impulse.

"No, certainly not."

"Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you do the carpets?"

"Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow; an unhappy, dying man."

"Nothing of the kind—as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived."

"Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?"

"Not at all; very gay and lively."

"Nonsense; you are joking."

"Will you follow me?" said Baisemeaux.

"What for?"

"To go the round of the Bastile."

"Why?"

"You will then see for yourself—see with your own eyes."

"But the regulations?"

"Never mind them. To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the post on the bastions; we are sole masters of the situation."

"No, no, my dear governor; why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in second or fourth Bertaudière, and then——"

"You are refusing an opportunity that may never present itself again. Do you know that, to obtain the favor I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand francs."

"Really! he must be worth seeing, then?"

"Forbidden fruit, my lord; forbidden fruit. You who belong to the church ought to know that."

"Well, if I had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich."

"Very well, we will see him too; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger."

"Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest."

"But a boarder at fifteen francs is always interesting."

"By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen francs for him, and only three francs for poor Sel-don?"

"The distinction made in that instance was a truly noble act, and one which displayed the king's goodness of heart to great advantage."

"The king's, you say?"

"The cardinal's, I mean; this unhappy man," said M. Mazarin, "is destined to remain in prison forever."

"Why so?"

"Why it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and, consequently, his punishment ought to be so too."

"Lasting?"

"No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, and even that is difficult, for we never get any impure air here."

"Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Do you, however, mean to say that this unfortunate man must suffer without interruption or termination?"

"I did not say he was to suffer, my lord; a fifteen-francs boarder does not suffer."

"He suffers imprisonment at all events."

"No doubt, there is no help for that, but this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat; for instance, such things as we have on the table now; this pastry that has not been touched, these crawfish from the River Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters; all these things will at once be taken to second Bertaudière, with

a bottle of that Volnay which you think so excellent. After you have seen it you will believe it, I hope."

"Yes, my dear governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your very happy fifteen-francs prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protégé*."

"Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves with this small bottle of port."

"You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux."

"Well, let us set off, then," said the governor, a little bewildered, partly from the wine he had drunk, and partly from Aramis's praises.

"Do not forget that I only go to oblige you," said the prelate."

"Very well; but you will thank me when you get there."

"Let us go then."

"Wait until I have summoned the jailer," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. "I am going to visit the towers," said the governor. "No guards, no drums, no noise at all."

"If I were not to leave my cloak here," said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, "I should really think I was going to prison on my own account."

The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the courtyard drew themselves up in line, as stiff as posts, as the governor passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which conducted to a sort of esplanade; thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honors. The governor turned toward Aramis, and, speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a

word he observed—"I hope you have a good memory, monsieur?"

"Why?" inquired Aramis.

"On account of your plans and your measurements, for you know that no one is allowed, not architects even, to enter where the prisoners are, with paper, pens or pencil."

"Good," said Aramis to himself, "it seems I am an architect, then? It sounds like one of D'Artagnan's jokes, who perceived in me the engineer of Belle-Isle." Then he added aloud, "Be easy on that score, monsieur; in our profession, a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient."

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. "Very well; we will first visit la Bertaudière," said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added, "you will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out."

"Dear M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "you are always forgetting No. 3."

"So I am," said the governor; and, upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks, for this single courtyard, would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age is, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps, along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated, as it were, with the atmosphere of those gloomy dungeons, moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, as he followed Baisemeaux without a syllable.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SECOND FLOOR OF LA BERTAUDIÈRE.

ON the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breathing of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. "Will you begin with this, one?" said Baisemeaux; "for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second."

"No, no," exclaimed Aramis, eagerly, "higher if you please; the one above is the more urgent." They continued their ascent. "Ask the jailer for the keys?" whispered Aramis. Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and, himself, opened the door of the third room. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions, which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred; Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth about eighteen years of age, who, raising his head at the unusual noise, jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands together, began to cry out, "My mother, my mother," in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame. "My dear boy," said Baisemeaux, endeavoring to smile, "I have brought you a diversion and an extra,—the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take your measure, and here are some preserves for your dessert."

"Oh, monsieur," exclaimed the young man, "keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of a year I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall see my mother again."

"But I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her, while here—upon my word!"

"If she were poor, monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her. Badly lodged with her! oh, monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free."

"At all events, since you yourself admit you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich——"

"But without any intention, I swear. Let me be punished,—cut off the hand which wrote it, I will work with the other—but restore my mother to me."

"My boy," said Baisemeaux, "you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates."

"Great heaven!" exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the ground.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. "Unhappy, wretched man," he murmured.

"Yes, monsieur, he is indeed very wretched," said the jailer; "but it is his parents' fault."

"In what way?"

"No doubt. Why did they let him learn Latin? Too much knowledge you see; it is that which does harm. Now I, for instance, can't read or write, and therefore I am not in prison." Aramis looked at the man, who seemed to think that being a jailer in the Bastille was not being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect

produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset. "You have forgotten to close the door," said the jailer.

"So I have," said Baisemeaux; "there are the keys, do you do it."

"I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy," said Aramis.

"And if you do not succeed," said Baisemeaux, "at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-franc list, by which both he and I shall be gainers."

"If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner," said Aramis, "I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measure from outside."

"No fear of that, monsieur architect, the one we are now going to see is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word."

"Let us go in, then," said Aramis, gloomily.

"Are you the architect of the prisons, monsieur?" said the jailer.

"I am."

"It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this."

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions he must summon all his strength of mind to his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. "Stay outside," he said to the jailer, "and wait for us at the bottom of the steps." The jailer obeyed and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window, could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an armchair, and all the upper part of his body reclining against it. His dress, thrown upon the bed, was of rich

black velvet, and he inhaled the fresh air which blew in upon his breast through a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognizing Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, fell upon the ground, as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux, habituated to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, he busied himself in arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not remark how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said, "You are looking very well,—are you so?"

"Quite well, I thank you, monsieur," replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis, and notwithstanding his control over himself, he advanced a few steps towards him, with his eyes wide open, and his lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his pre-occupation, observed it. "This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney," said Baisemeaux; "does it smoke?"

"Never, monsieur."

"You were saying just now," said the governor, rubbing his hands together, "that it was not possible for a man to be happy in prison; here, however, is one who is so. You have nothing to complain of, I hope?"

"Nothing."

"Do you ever feel weary?" said Aramis.

"Never."

"Ha, ha," said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice; "was I right?"

"Well, my dear governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowed to put any question to him?"

"As many as you like."

"Very well; be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here."

"This gentleman requests me to ask you," said Baisemeaux, "if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?"

"No, monsieur," said the young man, unaffectedly, "I am not."

"That is hardly possible," said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; "if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious."

"I was so during the early days of my imprisonment."

"Why are you not so now?"

"Because I have reflected."

"That is strange," said Aramis.

"Is it not odd?" said Baisemeaux.

"May one venture to ask you, monsieur, on what you have reflected?"

"I felt that as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me."

"What is a prison, then," inquired Aramis, "if it be not a punishment?"

"Alas! I cannot tell," said the young man: "all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago."

"To hear you converse, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment?"

"I endure it."

"In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?"

"I have no certainty; hope I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day."

"Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?"

"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents me expecting liberty; why should I have been imprisoned at all if it had been intended to release me afterwards?"

"How old are you?"

"I do not know."

"What is your name?"

"I have forgotten the name by which I was called."

"Who are your parents?"

"I never knew them."

"But those who brought you up?"

"They did not call me their son."

"Did you ever love any one before coming here?"

"I loved my nurse, and my flowers."

"Was that all?"

"I also loved my valet."

"Do you regret your nurse and your valet?"

"I wept very much when they died."

"Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?"

"They died the evening before I was carried off."

"Both at the same time?"

"Yes, both at the same time."

"In what manner were you carried off?"

"A man came for me, directed me to get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here."

"Would you be able to recognize that man again?"

"He was masked."

"Is not this an extraordinary tale?" said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.

"It is indeed extraordinary," he murmured.

"But what is still more extraordinary is, that he has never told me so much as he has just told you."

"Perhaps the reasons may be that you have never questioned him," said Aramis.

"It's possible," replied Baisemeaux; "I have no curiosity. Have you looked at the room; it's a fine one, is it not?"

"Very much so."

"A carpet——"

"Beautiful."

"I'll wager he had nothing like it before he came here."

"I think so, too." And then again turning towards the young man, he said, "Do you not remember to have been visited at some time or another by a strange lady or gentleman?"

"Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she raised when we were together, and alone."

"Do you remember that woman?"

"Yes."

"What did she say to you?"

The young man smiled mournfully, and then replied, "She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary?"

"What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?"

"She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me."

"Do you remember her?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you recall her features distinctly?"

"Yes."

"You would recognize her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her presence?"

"Most certainly."

A flush of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis's face. At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer approaching. "Shall we leave?" he said, hastily, to Aramis.

Aramis, who probably had learnt all that he cared to know, replied, "When you like."

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head, while Aramis, with a respect, arising perhaps from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them.

"Well," said Baisemeaux, as they descended the staircase, "what do you think of it all?"

"I have discovered the secret, my dear governor," he said.

"Bah! what is the secret, then?"

"A murder was committed in that house."

"Nonsense."

"But attend; the valet and nurse died the same day."

"Well."

"And by poison. What do you think?"

"That it is very likely to be true."

"What! that that young man is an assassin?"

"Who said that? What makes you think that poor young fellow could be an assassin?"

"The very thing I was saying. A crime was committed in his house," said Aramis, "and that was quite sufficient; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might say something."

"The deuce! if I only thought that——"

"Well?"

"I would redouble the surveillance."

"Oh, he does not seem to wish to escape."

"You do not know what prisoners are."

"Has he any books?"

"None; they are strictly prohibited, and under M. de Mazarin's own hand."

"Have you the writing still?"

"Yes my lord; would you like to look at it as you return to take your cloak?"

"I should, for I like to look at autographs."

"Well, then, this one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure."

"Ah, ah! an erasure; and in what respect?"

"With respect to a figure. At first there was written :
'To be boarded at 50 francs?'"

"As princes of the blood, in fact?"

"But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand; for he canceled the zero, and has added a 1 before the 5. But, by the by——"

"What?"

"You do not speak of the resemblance."

"I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason—because it does not exist."

"The deuce it doesn't."

"Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think it would be better for you not to speak about it."

"Really."

"The king, Louis XIV.—you understand—would be excessively angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed in any way, to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him."

"It is true, quite true," said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; "but I have not spoken of the circumstances to any one but yourself, and you understand, monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion."

"Oh, be easy."

"Do you still wish to see the note?"

"Certainly."

While engaged in this manner in conversation, they had returned to the governor's apartments; Baisemeaux took from the cupboard of a private register, like the one he had already shown Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it, being one of a small bunch of keys which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter "M," and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations:—"No books at any time, all linen and clothes of the finest and best quality to be procured; no exercise; always the same jailer; no communications with any one. Musical instruments; every liberty and every indulgence, which his welfare may require; to be boarded at 15 francs. M. de Baisemeaux can claim more if the 15 francs be not sufficient."

"Ah," said Baisemeaux, "now I think of it. I shall claim it."

Aramis shut the book. "Yes," he said, "it is indeed M. de Mazarin's handwriting; I recognize it well. Now, my dear governor," he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, "let us now turn to our own little affairs."

"Well, what time for repayment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself."

"There need not be any particular period fixed; give me a simple acknowledgment for 150,000 francs."

"When to be made payable?"

"When I require it, but you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do."

"Oh, I am quite easy on that score," said Baisemeaux, smiling; "but I have already given you two receipts."

"Which I now destroy," said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to Baisemeaux, he destroyed

them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly wrote out an acknowledgment of a debt of 150,000 francs, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor's shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgment into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. "Now," said Aramis, "you will not be angry with me if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

"What do you mean?"

"By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?"

"Yes, quite true, you did so."

"Well?"

"That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way."

"Adieu, adieu." And Aramis left, carrying with him the governor's best wishes.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

At the very time M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastille, a carriage drew up at Madame de Bellière's door, and, at that still early hour, a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Bellière, the latter was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette,

her maid being still in the next room. At the name—at the footsteps of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Bellière ran to meet her. She fancied she could detect in her friend's eyes a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure. Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "have you forgotten me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"

"I have not even seen the marriage *fêtes*."

"What are you doing with yourself, then?"

"I am getting ready to leave for Bellière."

"For Bellière?"

"Yes."

"You are becoming rustic in your tastes, then: I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."

"No, I am perfectly well."

"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."

"People say so many things."

"Yes, but this is very singular."

"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite."

"Well, I was afraid of vexing you."

"Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper."

"Well, then, it is said that—no, I shall never be able to tell you."

"Do not let us talk about it then," said Madame de Bellière, who detected the ill-nature that was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt the most anxious curiosity on the subject.

"Well, then, my dear marquise, it is said that, for some time past, you no longer continue to regret Monsieur de Bellière as you used to."

"It is an ill-natured report, Marguerite. I do regret, and shall always regret, my husband; but it is now two

years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not always to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so."

"Why not? Your heart is so soft and yielding," she said, spitefully.

"Yours is so too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded." These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite's rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against her friend's heart.

As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, "Well, Eliza, it is said you are in love." And she looked fixedly at Madame de Bellière, who blushed against her will.

"Women never escape slander," replied the marquise, after a moment's pause.

"No one slanders you, Eliza."

"What!—people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!"

"In the first place, if it be true, it is no slander, but simply a scandal-loving report. In the next place—for you did not allow me to finish what I was saying,—the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending herself with claws and teeth, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress; in other respects as impenetrable as that of Danaë, notwithstanding Danaë's tower was made of brass."

"You are witty, Marguerite," said Madame de Bellière, angrily.

"You always flatter me, Eliza. In short, however,

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you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You cannot decide whether the world is calumniating you or not;—but what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you ?”

“ I ? ”

“ Yes ; you are blushing and do not answer me.”

“ I was trying,” said the marquise, raising her beautiful eyes brightened with an indication of growing temper, “ I was trying to discover to what you could possibly have alluded, you who are so learned in mythological subjects in comparing me to Danaë.”

“ You were trying to guess that ? ” said Marguerite, laughing.

“ Yes ; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in arithmetic—ah ! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn—do you not remember, that if one of the terms were given, we were to find out the other ? Therefore do *you* guess now ? ”

“ I cannot conjecture what you mean.”

“ And yet nothing is more simple.

You pretend that I am in love, do you not ? ”

“ So it is said.”

“ Very well ; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report.”

“ Certainly, a name is mentioned.”

“ Very well ; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess this name, since you do not tell it.”

“ My dear marquise, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures.”

“ It was the word Danaë which you used that surprised me. Danaë means a shower of gold, does it not ? ”

“ That is to say that the Jupiter of Danaë changed himself into a shower of gold for her.”

"My lover, then, he whom you assign me——"

"I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and assign you no one."

"That may be; but those who are ill disposed towards me."

"Do you wish to hear the name?"

"I have been waiting this half hour for it."

"Well, then, you shall hear it. Do not be shocked; he is a man high in power."

"Good," said the marquise, as she clenched her hands like a patient at the approach of the knife.

"He is a very wealthy man," continued Marguerite; "the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is——"

The marquise closed her eyes for a moment.

"It is the Duke of Buckingham," said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. This perfidy had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marquise awaited, had precisely the same effect upon her as the badly sharpened axes, that had hacked, without destroying Messieurs de Chalais and De Thou upon the scaffold. She recovered herself, however, and said, "I was perfectly right in saying you were a witty woman, for you are making the time pass away most agreeably. This joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham."

"Never!" said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

"I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris."

"Oh!" resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her foot towards a paper which was lying on the carpet near the window; "it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write." The marquise trembled, for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered, and was sealed with the superintendant's arms. As she leaned back on the sofa on which

she was sitting, Madame de Bellière covered the paper with the thick folds of her large silk dress, and so concealed it.

"Come, Marguerite, tell me, is it to tell me all these foolish reports that you have come to see me so early in the day!"

"No; I came to see you in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and, sitting beneath an oak, or in some sylvan shade, used to talk of those we loved, and who loved us."

"Do you propose that we should go out together now?"

"My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal."

"I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady groves, a green sward covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived from where we are sitting."

"I regret your refusal, my dear marquise, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours."

"I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in the garden here, as it would be under the oaks in the wood yonder."

"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching Vincennes, marquise, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marquise suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of St. Mandé?"

"Of St. Mandé!" exclaimed Madame de Bellière; and the looks of both women met each other like two resistless swords.

"You, so proud!" said the marquise, disdainfully.

"I, so proud!" replied Madame Vanel. "Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect,—I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one who weeps at my abandonment, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly.

Madame de Bellière could not restrain an involuntary movement.

"She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself. "Then," continued the marquise, "you are quite enamored of the Duke of Buckingham—I mean of M. Fouquet?" Eliza felt the allusion, and her blood seemed to congeal in her heart. "And you wished to go to Vincennes,—to St. Mandé even?"

"I hardly know what I wished: you would have advised me, perhaps."

"In what respect?"

"You have often done so."

"Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always."

"But M. Fouquet has not wounded you," said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

"You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; I do not know of either obligation or injury received at his hands, but you have reason to complain of him. You are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like."

"Ah! you are prejudging the case."

"The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications."

"You overwhelm me," said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler pre-

paring for a last struggle; "you take only my evil dispositions and my weaknesses into calculation, and do not speak of my pure and generous feelings. If, at this moment, I feel instinctively attracted towards the superintendent, if I even make an advance to him, which, I confess, is very probable, my motive for it is, that M. Fouquet's fate deeply affects me, and because he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living."

"Ah!" said the marquise, placing her hand upon her heart, "something new, then, has occurred."

"Do you not know it?"

"I am utterly ignorant of everything about him," said Madame de Bellière with the poignant anguish that suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

"In the first place, then, the king's favor is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert."

"So it is stated."

"It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot of Belle-Isle."

"I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet's honor."

Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner, that Madame de Bellière could at that moment have delightedly plunged a dagger in her bosom. "Dearest," continued Marguerite, "there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet's honor; his safety is concerned. Before three days are past the ruin of the superintendent will be complete."

"Stay," said the marquise, in her turn smiling, "that is going a little too fast."

"I said three days, because I wish to deceive myself with a hope; but probably the catastrophe will be complete within twenty-four hours."

"Why so?"

"For the simplest of all reasons,—that M. Fouquet has no more money."

"In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day, who to-morrow can procure millions."

"That might be M. Fouquet's case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him, and wrung it from every possible or impossible source; but those friends are dead."

"Money does not die, Marguerite; it may be concealed, but it can be looked for, bought, and found."

"You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet: you might now show him the source whence he could obtain the millions which the king asked him for yesterday."

"Millions!" said the marquise, in terror.

"Four,—an even number."

"Infamous!" murmured Madame de Bellière, tortured by her friend's merciless delight.

"M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions," she replied, courageously.

"If he has those which the king requires to-day," said Marguerite, "he will not perhaps possess those which the king will demand in a month or so."

"The king will exact money from him again, then?"

"No doubt: and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money, and when he has no more, he will fall."

"It is true," said the marquise, trembling; "the plan is a bold one; but tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?"

"I think he does not like him. M. Colbert is powerful;

he improves on close acquaintance ; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion ; he will rise."

"He will be superintendent?"

"It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear marquise, why I felt myself impressed in favor of that poor man, who once loved, and even adored, me ; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets ; and why, moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation, or some good advice ; he would have understood the step I had taken, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love more highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence."

The marquise, bewildered, and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the greatest nicety and precision, hardly knew what answer to return ; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone ; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a wolf. "Well," said Madame de Bellière, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, marquise, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront . . . besides I have my husband to consider. You tell me nothing?—Very well, I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." Marguerite rose smilingly, as though to take leave, but the marquise had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said, suddenly, "You do not accompany me to

the door, then?" The marquise rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking of the envelope, which had occupied her attention so greatly at the commencement of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered, a few words, which Madame de Bellière did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marquise had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well-founded, advanced stealthily towards it like a panther, and seized the envelope. "Ah!" she said, gnashing her teeth, "it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet she was reading when I arrived," and then darted out of the room. During this interval, the marquise, having arrived behind the rampart, as it were, of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by an earthquake, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded at the same moment as the rolling of Marguerite's carriage leaving the hotel.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE.

THE blow had been the more painful on account of its being unexpected. It was some time before the marquise recovered herself; but, once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events so heartlessly announced to her.

She therefore returned, at the risk even of losing her life in the way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then—deep menaces concealed under the semblance of public interest—such were Colbert's maneuvers. A detestable delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, means of seduction no less wicked than the crime itself—such were the weapons Marguerite employed. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marquise perceived, with sorrow rather than indignation, that the king was an accomplice in the plot which betrayed the duplicity of Louis XIII., in his advanced age, and the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. The spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed its energy, no longer overwhelmed by indulgence in compassionate lamentations. The marquise was not one to weep when action was necessary, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune as long as means still existed of relieving it. For some minutes she buried her face in her cold fingers, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a steady hand, and with a gesture betraying a fixed determination of purpose. Her resolution was taken.

"Is everything prepared for my departure?" she inquired of one of her female attendants who entered.

"Yes, madame; but it was not expected that your ladyship would leave for Bellière for the next few days."

"All my jewels and articles of value, then, are packed up?"

"Yes, madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country."

"But they are all in order, you say?"

"Yes, in your ladyship's own room."

"The gold plate?"

"In the chest."

"And the silver plate?"

"In the great oak closet."

The marquise remained silent for a few moments, and then said calmly, "Let my goldsmith be sent for."

Her attendants quitted the room to execute the order. The marquise, however, had entered her own room, and was inspecting her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never, until now, had she bestowed such close attention upon riches in which women take so much pride; never, until now, had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to their settings or their colors. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched. The goldsmith, as he entered, found her thus occupied. "M. Fauchaux," she said, "I believe you supplied me with my gold service?"

"I did, your ladyship."

"I do not now remember the amount of the account."

"Of the new service, madame, or of that which M. de Bellière presented to you on your marriage? for I have furnished both?"

"First of all, the new one?"

"The covers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the *eau-épergne*, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the tea and coffee urns, cost your ladyship sixty thousand francs."

"No more?"

"Your ladyship thought the account very high."

"Yes, yes; I remember, in fact, that it was dear; but it was the workmanship, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame; the designs, the chasings—all new patterns."

"What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me."

"A third of its value, madame."

"There is the other service, the old one, that which belonged to my husband?"

"Yes, madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the other. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand francs."

"Thirty thousand," murmured the marquise. "But M. Fauchaux, there is also the service which belonged to my mother; all that massive plate which I did not wish to part with, on account of the associations connected with it."

"Ah! madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your ladyship, might not be in a position to keep their plate. In chasing that, they worked in solid metal. But that service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage."

"That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?"

"Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, which alone weigh five thousand livres, or ten thousand the pair."

"One hundred and thirty," murmured the marquise. "You are quite sure of your figures, M. Fauchaux?"

"Positive, madame. Besides, there is no difficulty in weighing them."

"The amount is entered in my books."

"Your ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware."

"Let us now turn to another subject," said Madame de Bellière: and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.

"I recognize these emeralds," said M. Fauchaux; "for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most

beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken; Madame de Châtillon has the most beautiful set; she had them from Messieurs de Guise; but your set, madame, comes next."

"What are they worth?"

"Mounted?"

"No; supposing I wished to sell them."

"I know very well who would buy them," exclaimed M. Faucheux.

"That is the very thing I ask. They could be sold, then?"

"All your jewels could be sold, madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase, it is of the very best; and what you purchase you do not part with."

"What could these emeralds be sold for, then?"

"A hundred and thirty thousand francs."

The marquise wrote down upon her tablets the amount which the jeweler mentioned. "The ruby necklace?" she said.

"Are they balas-rubies, madame?"

"Here they are."

"They are beautiful—magnificent. I did not know that your ladyship had these stones."

"What is their value?"

"Two hundred thousand francs. The center one is alone worth a hundred thousand."

"I thought so," said the marquise. "As for diamonds, I have them in numbers; rings, necklaces, sprigs, earrings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux."

The jeweler took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and silently made his calculations. "These stones," he said, "must have cost your ladyship an income of forty thousand francs."

"You value them at eight hundred thousand francs."

"Nearly so."

"It is about what I imagined—but the settings are not included."

"No, madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand francs."

"An agreeable sum."

"Very much so, madame."

"Will you accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?"

"But you do not intend to sell your diamonds, I suppose, madame?" exclaimed the bewildered jeweler.

"Silence, M. Faucheux, do not disturb yourself about that; give me an answer simply. You are an honorable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years; you knew my father and mother, whom your own father and mother served. I address you as a friend, will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?"

"Eight hundred thousand francs! it is enormous."

"I know it."

"Impossible to find."

"Not so."

"But reflect, madame, upon the effect which will be produced by the sale of your jewels."

"No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me, similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately, sell the stones only."

"In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones for Madame's toilette. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of 600,000 francs' worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful."

"When can you do so?"

"In less than three days' time."

"Very well, the remainder you will dispose of among private individuals. For the present, make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days."

"I entreat you to reflect, madame; for if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand francs."

"If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?"

"I do, your ladyship. I will not conceal from you that I shall make fifty thousand francs by the transaction."

"So much the better for you. In what way shall I have the money?"

"Either in gold, or in bills of the bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's."

"I agree," said the marquise, eagerly; "return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible."

"Yes, madame, but for Heaven's sake——"

"Not a word, M. Fauchaux. By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?"

"Fifty thousand francs, madame."

"That makes a million," said the marquise to herself.

"M. Fauchaux, you will take away with you both the gold and silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodeled on patterns more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, and return me its value in money, at once."

"It shall be done, your ladyship."

"You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and order him to wait for me in a carriage."

"In Madame de Fauchaux's carriage?" said the jeweler.

"If you will allow it, and I will call for it at your house."

"Certainly, your ladyship."

"I will direct some of my servants to convey the plate to your house." The marquise rung. "Let the small van be placed at M. Faucheux's disposal," she said. The jeweler bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud, that the marquise was about to have her plate melted down in order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style. Three hours afterwards she went to M. Faucheux's house and received from him eight hundred thousand francs in gold inclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry towards Madame Faucheux's carriage—for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths. These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years. The jeweler, though a *millionnaire*, was a modest man. He had purchased a substantial carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king's birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter in which he resided—it was covered with allegorical paintings, and clouds scattered over with stars. The marquise entered this somewhat extraordinary vehicle, sitting opposite the clerk, who endeavored to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marquise's dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marquise to drive, to take the road to St. Mandé.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DOWRY.

MONSIEUR FAUCHEUX's horses were serviceable animals, with thickset knees, and legs they had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they belonged to the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet as the English horses of M. Fouquet, and consequently took two hours to get to St. Mandé. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry. The marquise stopped the carriage at the door so well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will be remembered, no less painful than those which brought her now to it again. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it in the lock, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, anteroom, or boudoir rather, adjoining the saloon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marquise's feet. Madame de Bellière gave the coachman a louis, smiled gracefully at the clerk, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited in the room, alone and barricaded. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and desires of an expected guest. The fire was laid, candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the table, books scattered about, fresh-cut flowers in the vases. One might almost have imagined it an enchanted house.

The marquise lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound thought. Her deep musings, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain vague joy. Spread out before her was a treasure, a million wrung from her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue corn-flower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea, naturally enough, was the first to present itself to her mind. But although, on reflection, it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would then ring to summon M. Fouquet and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found one. But, being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said the least particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room, so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants, she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had displaced—whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures,—had not already recognized her. To secure success, it was necessary that some steps should be seriously taken, and it was necessary also that the superintendent should comprehend the serious position in which he was placed, in order to yield compliance with the generous fancies of a woman; all the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him, and, should this be insufficient, the maddening influence of a devoted passion, which, in its resolute determination to carry conviction, would not be turned aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling?

Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had stripped herself? No! He would resist, and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to Madame de Bellière with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not the same with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears when they have gained a victory? "I must learn if it be so, and must judge of that for myself," said the marquise. "Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses, and full of alloy? Who can tell if that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come," she said, "this is doubting and hesitating too much—to the proof." She looked at the timepiece. "It is now seven o'clock," she said; "he must have arrived; it is the hour for signing his papers." With a feverish impatience she rose and walked towards the mirror, in which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotedness; she touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell. Then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle she had just undergone, she threw herself on her knees, in utter abandonment, before a large couch, in which she buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterwards she heard the spring of the door sound. The door moved upon invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, that a man, so devoted to pleasure, for whom

indeed pleasure meant everything, should obey such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines of anxiety around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was, and the melancholy expression of his mouth, a rare expression with men, gave a new character to his features, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace in front of his chest much disarranged by his feverishly restless hand, the looks of the superintendent, full of dreamy reflection, were fixed upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Bellière, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves, its every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has graciously granted to women, on account of their very weakness, more than it has accorded to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marquise divined in a single glance the whole weight of the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in deceptions. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She rose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, monsieur, and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."

"What is that, madame?" said Fouquet, astonished.

"That you have never loved me so much as at this moment; in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh! madame," said Fouquet, whose face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, "you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you, and entreat forgiveness."

"Your forgiveness is granted, then," said the marquise. Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. "No, no," she said, "sit here by my side. Ah! that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind."

"How do you detect it, madame?"

"By the smile that has just marred the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was—no secrets between friends."

"Tell me, then, madame, why have you been so harsh these three or four months past?"

"Harsh?"

"Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?"

"Alas!" said Madame de Bellière, sighing, "because your visit to me was the cause of your being visited with a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes that have seen you already might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; and, lastly, because I know you to be already unhappy enough not to wish to increase your unhappiness further."

Fouquet started, for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent,—he who, for the last few minutes, had indulged in all the wild aspirations of the lover. "I unhappy?" he said, endeavoring to smile: "indeed, marquise, you will almost make me believe I am so, judging from your own sadness.

Are your beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity ?
—I was looking for another expression from them."

"It is not I who am sad, monsieur : look in the mirror, there—it is yourself."

"It is true I am somewhat pale, marquise; but it is from overwork; the king yesterday required a supply of money from me."

"Yes, four millions : I am aware of it."

"You know it?" exclaimed Fouquet, in a tone of surprise; "how can you have learnt it? It was after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king——"

"You perceive that I do know it; is not that sufficient? Well, go on, monsieur, the money the king has required you to supply——"

"You understand, marquise, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered, —altogether a long affair. Since Monsieur de Mazarin's death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and this is the reason why I have not slept during the past night."

"So that you have the amount?" inquired the marquise, with some anxiety.

"It would indeed be strange, marquise," replied Fouquet, cheerfully, "if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers."

"Yes, yes, I believe you either have, or will have them."

"What do you mean by saying I shall have them?"

"It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions."

"On the contrary, to me it seems almost an age; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer."

"On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you."

"I am at a loss to compass your meaning," said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

"Tell me, monsieur, is the office of superintendent a permanent position?"

"You surprise me, marchioness, for you speak as if you had some motive or interest in putting the question."

"My reason is simple enough; I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish you to know if you are certain of your post."

"Really marquise, I am at a loss what to reply: I cannot conceive your meaning."

"Seriously then, dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in land, and am anxious to intrust it to some friend who will turn it to account."

"Surely it does not press," said M. Fouquet.

"On the contrary, it is very pressing."

"Very well, we will talk of that by and by."

"By and by will not do, for my money is there," returned the marquise, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold. Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Bellière, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then suddenly starting back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. "Madame, madame," he murmured, "what opinion can you have of me when you make me such an offer?"

"Of you!" returned the marquise. "Tell me rather, what you yourself think of the step I have taken."

"You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Can I not read your heart?"

"If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart I offer you."

"I have guessed rightly, then," exclaimed Fouquet. "In truth, madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner."

"Insult you," she said, turning pale, "what singular delicacy of feeling! You tell me you love me; in the name of that affection you wish me to sacrifice my reputation and my honor, yet, when I offer you money which is my own, you refuse me."

"Madame, you are at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honor. Permit me to preserve mine. Leave me to my ruin, leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which surround me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load even of my remorse, but, for Heaven's sake, madame, do not overwhelm me with this last infliction."

"A short time since, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment, now you are wanting in feeling."

Fouquet, pressed his clenched hand upon his breast, heaving with emotion, saying "Overwhelm me, madame, for I have nothing to reply."

"I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet."

"Yes, madame, and you limited yourself to that."

"And what I am now doing is the act of a friend."

"No doubt it is."

"And you reject this mark of my friendship?"

"I do reject it."

"Monsieur Fouquet, look at me," said the marquise, with glistening eyes, "I now offer you my love."

"Oh, madame," exclaimed Fouquet."

"I have loved you for a long while past: women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it. Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have

refused you ; I was blind, as you were a little while since ; but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love I now offer you."

"Oh ! madame, you overwhelm me beneath a load of happiness."

"Will you be happy, then, if I am yours—entirely?"

"It will be the supremest happiness for me."

"Take me, then. If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple."

"Do not tempt me."

"Do not refuse me."

"Think seriously of what you are proposing."

"Fouquet, but one word. Let it be No, and I open this door," and she pointed to the door which led into the streets, "and you will never see me again. Let that word be Yes, and I am yours entirely."

"Elise ! Elise ! But this coffer ?"

"Contains my dowry."

"It is your ruin," exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers, "there must be a million here."

"Yes, my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you."

"This is too much," exclaimed Fouquet. "I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate so much devotion. I accept the dowry."

"And take the woman with it," said the marquise, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LE TERRAIN DE DIEU.

DURING the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes traveled in excellent companionship, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in undisturbed harmony together. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the greater part of his *adieux* were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen, and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively—a precaution on the part of the queen-mother, which saved him the distress of any private conversation with Monsieur, and also the danger of seeing Madame again. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on beforehand, and in the evening he set off in his traveling carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away, in so abrupt a manner, by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance in this respect he was absolutely obliged, therefore, to submit to the burden of his own evil thoughts and caustic spirit.

Such of his friends in whom he had been able to confide, had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke's superiority. Others, less brilliant, but more sensible, had reminded him of the king's orders prohibiting dueling. Others, again, and they the larger number, who, in virtue of charity, or national vanity, might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and

would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was, that, after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham's carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have done an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him refreshments, and spread over his knees the sable cloak that had been thrown on the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame; of Monsieur, without speaking of domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife; of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in-law, of the king of England, without alluding to his sister-in-law; of the state of the affections of either of the travelers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous. In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable, and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman, from wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his traveling companion. Elegant repasts were served, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses made in the beautiful meadows that skirted the road; coursing indulged in, for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him; and in such ways did they pass away the pleasant time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which folds France a thousand times in its loving embrace, before deciding upon joining its waters with the ocean. In quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter he had brought to Paris whom he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her—his every memory, a regret. Therefore, whenever, now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost

in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings. This delicacy might have touched Buckingham, and changed his feelings toward De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice, and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless ; nothing appeases them ; a few ashes may sometimes, apparently, extinguish them ; but beneath those ashes, the smothered embers rage more furiously. Having exhausted every means of amusement the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais, towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants, since the previous evening, had travelled in advance, and now chartered a boat, for the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or bore broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within cannon-shot of the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipages from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been embarked, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and their coats not even turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that, in short voyages, horses refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while, with the best of food before them, such as they would have greatly coveted on land. By degrees, the duke's entire equipage was transported on board the yacht ; he was then informed that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman. For no one could possibly imagine that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with his grace than those of friendship. Buck-

ingham desired the captain to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation.

As he said this he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of deepest azure in the horizon, the amphitheater of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disc to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of snowy mountains, whose summits were heaped one upon another. The dome of clouds was tinged at its base with, as it were, the foam of rubies, fading away into opal and pearly tints, in proportion as the gaze was carried from base to summit. The sea was gilded with the same reflection, and, upon the crest of every sparkling wave danced a point of light, like a diamond by lamplight. The mildness of the evening, the sea breezes, so dear to contemplative minds, setting in from the east and blowing in delicious gusts; then, in the distance, the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky—while, dotting the horizon, might be seen, here and there, vessels with their trimmed sails, like the wings of a seagull about to plunge: such a spectacle indeed, well merited admiration. A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, amongst whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. As for Buckingham, who was dressed very simply, in a gray satin vest, and doublet of violet-colored velvet, wearing his hat thrust over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, he was taken no more notice of than De Wardes, who was in black, like an attorney.

The duke's attendants had received directions to have

a boat in readiness at the jetty head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them,—“whatever may happen,” he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood. Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes. “I think it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing.”

“I await your orders, my lord, but——”

“But, you mean, we are still upon soil which is part of the king’s territory.”

“Exactly.”

“Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circle of water? the pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to heaven, for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king’s charts. Do you observe it?”

“Yes; but we can hardly reach it now, without getting our feet wet.”

“Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises on every side, leaving the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?”

“I shall be perfectly happy wherever I may have the honor of crossing my sword with your lordship’s.”

“Very well, then, I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes, but it is most essential you should be able to say to the king, ‘Sire, I did not fight upon your majesty’s territory.’ Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle, but, since Port-Royal, your nation delights in subtleties of expression. Do not

let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry ourselves, for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in."

"My reason for not walking faster was, that I did not wish to precede your grace. Are you still on dry land, my lord?"

"Yes, at present I am. Look yonder! my servants are afraid we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you remark how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But, as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?"

"You will observe, my lord, that in turning your back to them, you will have the sun full in your face."

"Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour and it will soon disappear; do not be uneasy on that score."

"As you please, my lord: it was out of consideration for your lordship that I made the remark."

"I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I fully appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?"

"As you please, my lord."

"Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to the French territory. We could fight in England, or even upon my yacht."

"We are exceedingly well placed here, my lord; only I have the honor to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time——"

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet and threw it on the ground, a proceeding which De Wardes imitated. Both their bodies, which seemed like phantoms to those who were looking at them from the shore, were thrown strongly into relief by a dark red

violet-colored shadow with which the sky became over-spread.

"Upon my word, your grace," said De Wardes, "we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?"

"I have sunk up to the ankles," said Buckingham, "without reckoning that the water is even now breaking in upon us."

"It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, your grace," said De Wardes, who drew his sword, a movement imitated by the duke.

"M. de Wardes," said Buckingham, "one final word. I am about to fight you because I do not like you,—because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain devotional regard I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that, at this moment, I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a bad and heartless man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my very utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that, if you survive this engagement, you will, in the future, work great mischief towards my friends. That is all I have to remark, M. de Wardes," continued Buckingham, as he saluted him.

"And I, my lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto, but, since you give me such a character, I hate you, and will do all I possibly can to kill you;" and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning in a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other, guessed their position, and met. Both were practiced swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his sword arrested,—he had just touched Buckingham's

shoulder. The duke's sword sunk, as his arm was lowered.

"You are wounded, my lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.

"Yes, monsieur, but only slightly."

"Yet you quitted your guard."

"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered."

"Let us go on, if you please." And disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded the marquis in the breast.

"A hit?" he said.

"No," cried De Wardes, not moving from his place.

"I beg your pardon, but, observing that your shirt was stained——" said Buckingham.

"Well," said De Wardes furiously, "it is now your turn."

And, with a terrible lunge, he pierced Buckingham's arm, the sword passing between the two bones. Buckingham feeling his right arm paralyzed, stretched out his left, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, he thrust him through the breast. De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine reflection than that which it had borrowed from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead; he felt the terrible danger that menaced him, for the sea rose fast. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort, and an exclamation of pain, he tore out the blade which remained in his arm, and, turning towards De Wardes, said, "Are you dead, marquis?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."

"Well, what is to be done; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.

"Impossible," he replied. Then falling down again, said, "Call to your people, or I shall be drowned."

"Hallo! boat there! quick, quick!"

The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach. Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round his body, and raised him up. The wave ascended to his waist, but did not move him. The duke immediately began to carry his late antagonist towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces, when a second wave, rushing onwards higher, more furious and menacing than the former, struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over, and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the strand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment, four of the duke's sailors, who comprehended the danger, threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme, when they observed how their master became covered with blood, in proportion as the water, with which it was impregnated, flowed towards his knees and feet;—they wished to carry him.

"No, no," exclaimed the duke, "take the marquis on shore first."

"Death to the Frenchman!" cried the English sullenly.

"Wretched knaves!" exclaimed the duke, drawing himself up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, "obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes' safety to be looked for first, or I will have you all hanged."

The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary

and steward leaped into the sea, and approached the marquis, who no longer showed any sign of life.

"I commit him to your care, as you value your lives," said the duke. "Take M. de Wardes on shore." They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, where the tide never rose so high. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them, at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him the acutest pain. The duke's secretary drew out a purse filled with gold from his pocket, and handed it to the one among those present who appeared of most importance, saying:—"From my master, His Grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every possible care may be taken of the Marquis de Wardes."

Then, followed by those who had accompanied him, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, but only after he had seen De Wardes out of danger. By this time it was high tide: embroidered coats, and silk sashes were lost; many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke's and De Wardes' clothes to the shore, and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke's doublet, under the belief that it was his own, when the fishermen carried him in their arms towards the town.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THREEFOLD LOVE.

As soon as Buckingham departed, Guiche imagined the coast would be perfectly clear for him without any interference. Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who, besides, permitted himself to be monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty and freedom in his house as the most exacting could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a strong predilection for his sister-in-law's society, invented a variety of amusements, in quick succession to each other, in order to render her residence in Paris as cheerful as possible, so that in fact, not a day passed without a ball at the Palais-Royal, or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited. Madame led a life of incessant occupation, neither her voice nor her pen were idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming a tone of interest which might unmistakably be recognized as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be colors of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a *sachet* or a flower; there are words in this style of conversation, which every one might listen to, but there are gestures and sighs that every one cannot perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with

De Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes or emblematical devices : this spring was not only the May-tide of nature, it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequaled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him, even the queen his wife. This mighty monarch was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom, to such a degree, indeed, that he did not confess his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having any preference shown her beyond that shown to others. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty ; but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this, and constituted himself the sovereign prince of the whole laughter-loving court. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais ; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Châtillon ; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears for one person alone. In this manner, and, as it were, without design, he devoted himself to Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he had estranged himself too much previous to the arrival of Madame, but, after her arrival, he did not estrange himself sufficiently. This conduct, which every one had observed, had been particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment because he was of a very cheerful disposition, even in his remarks most full of malice, and because he was never at

a loss how to wile the time away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, having noticed that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his absence, Monsieur hardly inquired about him, for he had De Guiche with him, and, except the time given to conversation with Madame, his days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were some amethysts to be looked at, De Guiche returned to Madame's cabinet. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the time he devoted to dressing and decorating himself; he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one could tell where the chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame's apartments dressed in his morning-gown. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room; at one end, a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together, amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end, Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged at cards by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, while two others were standing by, laughing. In another part were Madame, seated upon some cushions on the floor, and De Guiche, on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while the princess, with her white and slender fingers pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another

corner of the room, a guitar-player was playing some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with a melancholy expression of voice. But the songs which the Spanish princess had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile that well displayed her beautiful teeth. The cabinet presented, in fact, the most perfect representation of unrestrained pleasure and amusement. As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist exclaiming, like a child, "What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I am sick and tired of being alone!"

The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder coming to interrupt the warbling of birds under the leafy covert of the trees; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanor. The guitar-player thrust his instrument under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the prince's observation. Madame was the only one who did not move, and smiling at her husband, said, "Is not this the hour you usually devote to your toilette?"

"An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves," replied the prince, grumblingly.

This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout; the women fled like a flock of terrified starlings; the guitar-player vanished like a shadow; Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who purposely widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near Madame, and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The

count was too happy to bear malice against the husband; but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. Nothing was wanting but a quarrel; he sought it. And the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so joyous before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they run away at the very sight of me?" he inquired, in a supercilious tone; to which remark Madame replied, "that, whenever the master of the house made his appearance, the family kept aloof out of respect." As she said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace, that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laughter; Madame followed their example, and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and he was obliged to sit down, as for laughing he could scarcely keep his equilibrium. However, he very soon left off, but his anger had increased. He was still more furious because he had permitted himself to laugh, than from having seen others laugh. He looked at Manicamp steadily, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche; but, at a sign which displayed no little amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room, so that Madame, left alone, began sadly to pick up her pearls and amethysts, no longer smiling, and speaking still less.

"I am very happy," said the duke, "to find myself treated as a stranger here, madame," and he left the room in a passion. On his way out, he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the anteroom. "It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here, but outside the door."

Montalais made a very low obeisance. "I do not quite understand what your royal highness does me the honor to say."

"I say that when you are all laughing together in Ma-

dame's apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside."

"Your royal highness does not think, and does not speak so, of yourself?"

"On the contrary, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself about the receptions I meet with here at any time. How is it that, on the very day there is music and a little society in Madame's apartments—in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine—on the very day that I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all took wing as soon as I appeared? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?"

"Yet nothing has been done to-day, monseigneur, which is not done every day."

"What! do they laugh like that every day?"

"Why, yes, monseigneur."

"The same group of people simpering and the same singing and strumming going on every day?"

"The guitar, monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes; ladies soon weary without music."

"The deuce!—and the men?"

"What men, monseigneur?"

"M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the rest of them?"

"They all belong to your highness's household."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said the prince, as he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the largest of his arm-chairs, without looking at himself in the glass. "Where can the chevalier be?" said he. One of the prince's attendants happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied,—

"No one knows, your highness."

"Still the same answer. The first one who answers me again, 'I do not know,' I will discharge." Every one at this remark hurried out of his apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame's apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonier, which tumbled on the carpet, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down one after another, an enameled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabrum. The noise summoned every one to the various doors.

"What is your highness's pleasure?" said the captain of the guards, timidly.

"I am treating myself to some music," replied the prince, gnashing his teeth.

The captain of the guards desired his royal highness's physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, "Monseigneur, the Chevalier de Lorraine is here."

The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

CHAPTER L.

M. DE LORRAINE'S JEALOUSY.

THE Duc d'Orleans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed," he said; "by what happy chance do I see you? Had you, indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"A caprice?"

"I to venture upon caprices with your highness! The respect——"

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you; but why did you leave me?"

"Because I felt that I was of no further use to you.

"Explain yourself."

"Your highness has people about you who are far more amusing than I can ever be. I felt I was not strong enough to enter into contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."

"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common-sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend? De Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"This is absurd. Does De Guiche annoy you?"

"I do not say he does; do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"Excuse me, monseigneur, let us say no more about it." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst—by removing that which quenches it; or in other words, by denying an explanation.

"No, no," said the prince, "I wish to know why you went away."

"In that case, monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not get angry. I remarked that my presence was disagreeable."

"To whom?"

"To Madame."

"What do you mean?" said the duke in astonishment.

"It is simple enough: Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me."

"Has she shown it to you?"

"Madame never addresses a syllable to me, particularly since a certain time."

"Since *what* time?"

"Since the time when, M. De Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at every and any hour."

The duke colored. "At any hour, chevalier; what do you mean by that?"

"You see, your highness, I have already displeased you; I was quite sure I should."

"I am not displeased; but what you say is rather startling. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?"

"I shall say no more," said the chevalier, saluting the prince ceremoniously.

"On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous."

"One cannot help being jealous, monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal highness jealous of Madame? Would you not, if you saw some one always near Madame, and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One's friends are as one's lovers. Your highness has sometimes conferred the distinguished honor upon me of calling me your friend."

"Yes, yes: but you used a phrase which has a very equivocal signification; you are unfortunate in your phrases."

"What phrases, monseigneur?"

"You said, 'treated with great favor.' What do you mean by favor?"

"Nothing can be more simple," said the chevalier, with an expression of great frankness: "for instance, whenever a husband remarks that his wife summons such and such a man near her—whenever this man is always to be found by her side, or in attendance at the door of her carriage; whenever the bouquet of the one is always the same color as the ribbons of the other—when music and supper par-

ties are held in private apartments—whenever a dead silence takes place immediately the husband makes his appearance in his wife's rooms—and when the husband suddenly finds that he has, as a companion, the most devoted and the kindest of men, who, a week before, was with him as little as possible; why, then——”

“Well, finish.”

“Why, then, I say, monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them.”

The duke was evidently much agitated, and seemed to struggle within himself a good deal. “You have not told me,” he then remarked, “why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from a fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame's part to encourage De Guiche.”

“Pardon me, monseigneur, I did not say that.”

“You did, indeed.”

“Well, if I did say so, I observed nothing but what was very inoffensive.”

“At all events, you remarked something.”

“You embarrass me, monseigneur.”

“What does that matter? Answer me. If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?”

“I always speak the truth, monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say.”

“Ah! repeat? It appears that it is talked about then?”

“I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject.”

“Who?” said the prince.

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air, as he replied, “Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to cross-examination; you treat me as a criminal at the bar; the

rumors which idly pass by a gentleman's ears do not remain there. Your highness wishes me to magnify rumor until it attains the importance of an event."

"However," said the duke in great displeasure, "the fact remains that you withdrew on account of this report."

"To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and more than that, allowable. But do not be unjust, monseigneur, and do not attach any undue importance to it. It does not concern you."

"M. de Guiche's attentions to Madame do not concern me?"

"No, monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the attentions he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only you understand, what I am afraid of—I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous as far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame—and who, indeed, would *not* love her? Follow me attentively, as I proceed:—Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf, in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to support Madame's indifference. I have, therefore, made up my mind to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Well, monseigneur, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? It is not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands. After a silence, long enough to enable the chevalier to judge of the effect of this oratorical display the duke rose, saying, "Come, be candid."

"As I always am."

"Very well. You know that we already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."

"Do not say anything against Madame, monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. It is impossible you can be suspicious of Madame?"

"No, no, chevalier; I do not suspect Madame; but in fact, I observe—I compare——"

"Buckingham was a madman, monseigneur."

"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."

"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes. It was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg." And he began to laugh in so harsh a manner that it sounded like the hiss of a serpent.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."

"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

"Am I not right? for does not M. de Guiche hold the chief post of honor in your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"

"Pardon me, monseigneur; you are again mistaken; no one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort."

"Very good."

"You see, monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed you to conjure up, by the aid of any scruples I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes, and she would be in the right, too."

"What would you do?"

"Act reasonably."

"In what way?"

"I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicurean philosophers: and, in that way, the rumors will cease."

"Well, I will see; I will think over it."

"Oh, you have time enough; the danger is not great; and then, besides, it is not a question either of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear I had to see your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment you restore it, with so kind an assurance of its existence, I have no longer any other idea in my head."

The duke shook his head, as if he meant to say: "If you have no more ideas, I have though." It being now the dinner-hour, the prince sent to inform Madame of it; but she returned a message to the effect that she could not be present, but would dine in her own apartment.

"That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning having taken them by surprise, in the midst of a musical party, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh; "I regret De Guiche is not here."

"Oh! De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me, in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be

the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."

"Ah! chevalier, you are really a very good-natured fellow."

"You say that as if you were surprised."

"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."

"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."

"I confess that."

"Will your highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?"

"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, called his different attendants with the greatest care, as if he was giving them different orders. All went off in various directions; but he retained his *valet de chambre*. "Ascertain, and immediately, too, if M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can one learn it?"

"Very easily, monsieur. I will ask Malicorne, who will find out from Mlle. de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants are gone, and he must have left with them."

"Ascertain, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed, when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants' staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter," said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"

"Look, monsieur," said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree."

"Ah?" said the chevalier. "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will see in a moment, monsieur, if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"

"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there though?"

"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase, belonging to the ladies of honor, is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable news you tell me."

"Is it not, monsieur?"

"Was it M. de Malicorne who told you this?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He likes you, then?"

"No, monsieur, it is Monsieur he likes."

"Why?"

"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"And most certainly he shall. How much did he give you for that?"

"The secret which I now dispose of to you, monsieur."

"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."

"Thank you, monsieur. Look, look, the little door opens, a woman admits the musicians."

"It is Montalais."

"Hush, monseigneur; do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."

"Very well; I have seen nothing."

"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that Guiche had entered, returned to the prince, whom he found splendidly

dressed and radiant with joy, as with good looks. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, monseigneur, it is you whom this device would best suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"

"He cannot be found. He has fled—has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning terrified him. He could not be found in his apartments."

"Bah! the hair-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor man! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a very festival of ideas; I have another."

"What is it?"

"Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her her revenge; go and dine with her."

"Oh! that would be acting like a weak and whimsical husband."

"It is the duty of a good husband to do so. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and her eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, monseigneur, come."

"I cannot; for I have directed dinner to be served here."

"Yet see, monseigneur, how dull we shall be; I shall be low-spirited because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame's dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry; you were in the wrong this morning."

"Well, perhaps I was."

"There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact you were so."

"Chevalier, chevalier, your advice is not good."

"Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit, embroidered with gold, becomes you admirably. Madame will be as much vanquished by the man as by the action. Come, monseigneur."

"You decide me; let us go."

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier, and went towards Madame's apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to his valet, "Be sure that there are some people before the little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run." And he followed the duke towards the antechambers of Madame's suit of apartments, and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "His Highness wishes to surprise Madame."

CHAPTER LI.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF GUICHE.

MONSIEUR entered the room abruptly, as persons do who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those who hope to surprise some secret, the terrible reward of jealous people. Madame, almost out of her senses with joy at the first bars of music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving the dinner, which had been already begun, unfinished. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who, with his arms raised, and his eyes half closed, was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with looks full of passion, and gestures of the most caressing character. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile, and the same air of alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Vallière, seated

in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully. It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of the prince produced upon this gleeful company, and it would be equally impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move; Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures and of an attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning his back against the doorway, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince, and the convulsive twitching of his hands and limbs, were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the merry music of the dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche most respectfully, affecting to join them together in his reverences as though they were the master and mistress of the house. Monsieur then approached them, saying, in a hoarse tone of voice, "I am delighted: I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I find you abandoning yourself to new amusements; really, it is most fortunate. My house is the pleasantest in the kingdom." Then turning towards De Guiche, "Comte," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And, again addressing his wife, he said, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame; whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me. I am a prince, unfortunately, very much neglected."

Guiche had now recovered his self-possession, and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him, and sat so well upon him, he said, "Your Highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not remark that your ladies deprive me of my friends; M. de Guiche does not belong to you, madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me you have your ladies. When I dine alone I have my gentlemen; do not strip me of *everything*."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are. I was not aware that we were not allowed to be seen; but, since such is your desire, I will conform myself to it; pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred, even."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured the chevalier in the duke's ear in such a manner that every one could observe he was endeavoring to calm him.

"Come," replied the prince, as his only answer to the remark, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame. The chevalier followed him to his own apartment, where the prince had no sooner seated himself than he gave free vent to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes towards the ceiling, joined his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion," exclaimed the prince.

"Upon what?"

"Upon what is taking place here."

"Oh, monseigneur, it is a very serious matter."

It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."

"How miserable all this is," said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."

"I do not say that, monseigneur."

"Yes, but I say it: for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."

"What do you mean?"

"To conceal oneself for the purpose of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tête-à-tête*."

"No, no, monseigneur."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must learn what is really going on."

"Oh, monseigneur, an exposure——"

"O y Heaven, monsieur, *shall* I put myself out of the way, when people show so little consideration for me! Wait for me here, chevalier, wait for me here." The prince disappeared in the neighboring apartment and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel. Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete; peace restored to her family, a nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch, who had shown an aptitude for affairs of great importance; the revenues of the state increased; external peace assured; everything seemed to promise a tranquil future. Her thoughts recurred, now and then, to the poor young nobleman whom she had received as a mother, and had driven away as a hard-hearted step-mother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly, the Duc d'Orleans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed hurriedly, closing the door, "things cannot go on as they are now."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved suavity of manner, said, "What do you allude to?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, madame."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh! yes, madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham."

"Of whom else could it be, then? for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought——"

"My wife, madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has so managed matters, that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments—always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together, and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, madame, I am the sufferer from it."

"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."

"Of course, you will begin to say for this gentleman, what you already said on behalf of the other."

"Because, Philip," said the queen, dryly, "what you

did for the other, you are going to do for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If to give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"

"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, I would believe you without your bringing facts forward; but, as jealousy is in the case, I promise nothing."

"It is just the same as if your majesty were to desire me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."

"Far from it; as you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."

"Oh, say what you think; you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of depraved mind——"

"But facts, mother, facts!"

"Well, I am listening."

"This morning at ten o'clock, they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"No harm in that, surely."

"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone——Ah! I forgot to tell you, that, during the last ten days, he has never left her side."

"If they were doing any harm they would hide themselves."

"Very good," exclaimed the duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray remember with precision the words you have just uttered. This morning I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offense. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is, sometimes, almost equivalent to telling them they might be guilty of even worse."

"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you just this moment said that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have hidden themselves."

"Yes, I said so."

"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of the morning, and imagining that Guiche was sulking in his own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what, or whom, I found there?—Another set of musicians; more dancing, and Guiche himself—he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"As much—oh, no! he muttered some impertinent remark or another."

"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"

"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that Guiche is the one who is really to blame in the matter."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"

"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was, and I shall ask the king, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, my dear mother, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."

"I will not do it, Philip."

"What, madame?"

"Listen, Philip; I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without running

the chance of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

"Very well, I know what I shall do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. "What do you intend to do?" she said.

"I will have him drowned in my fish-pond the very next time I find him in my apartments again." Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved.

"Do so," she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, "Every one betrays me,—no one cares for me; my mother even joins my enemies."

"Your mother, Philip, sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you will not listen to her."

"I will go to the king."

"I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his Majesty: it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself."

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the anteroom open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king's footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape. Anne of Austria could not resist laughing, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau was complete. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a vivacious tone

himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and, in a voice full of playfulness, said "Do you know, sire, that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"Why, madame?"

"Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least."

"Explain yourself."

"Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen."

"Certainly not."

"And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married but a fortnight."

"Well?"

"He is now finding fault with Madame a second time."

"What, Buckingham still?"

"No, another."

"Who?"

"Guiche."

"Really, Madame is a coquette, then?"

"I fear so."

"My poor brother," said the king, laughing.

"You don't object to coquettes, it seems?"

"In Madame, certainly I do: but Madame is not a coquette at heart."

"That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it."

"What does he want?"

"He wants to drown Guiche."

"That is a violent measure to resort to."

"Do not laugh; he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done."

"To save Guiche—certainly."

"Oh, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle did against your father."

"No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I, on my side, have too great a regard for him; we shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?"

"That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette and Guiche from being amiable."

"Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of sovereign power. To reform a man, not to speak about reforming a woman!"

"How will you set about it?"

"With a word to Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him."

"But Madame?"

"That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and read it to her."

"There is no time to be lost."

"Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet this afternoon."

"You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?"

"Yes, madame."

"You promise to convert her?"

"I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her, or by extreme measures."

"That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair; Madame would never forgive me all her life, and as a mother-in-law, I ought to desire to live on good terms with my new-found daughter."

"The king, madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect."

"What about?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment."

"Would that not seem a somewhat serious step to take?"

"Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers,

and the music of the ballet would drown half my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother's part, so that a little precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?"

"I believe so."

"What is my statement of grievances to consist of?"

"In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; Guiche's assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices."

"And the proofs?"

"There *are* none."

"Very well; I will go at once to see Madame." The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and his face, which was radiant as the morning. "I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance," said the king.

"Fire and water cannot be more opposite."

"That will do. Permit me, madame, to kiss your hands, the most beautiful hands in France."

"May you be successful, sire,—as the family peacemaker."

"I do not employ an ambassador," said Louis; "which is as much as to say that I shall succeed." He laughed as he left the room, and carelessly adjusted his ruffles as he went along.

CHAPTER LII.

THE MEDIATOR.

WHEN the king made his appearance in Madame's apartments, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal misunderstanding had dispersed through the various apart-

ments, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analyzing with delight, contributing to the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger, as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had herself said, the presence of the king gave a solemn and serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662, the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king's intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, was a matter of no inconsiderable moment.

The boldest, even, who had been the associates of the Comte de Guiche, had, from the first moment, held aloof from him, with a sort of nervous apprehension; and the comte himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own room. The king entered Madame's private apartments, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honor were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although His Majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king's gaze fall upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken masses upon the most beautiful skin imaginable, was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the knocks which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Vallière, whom Montalais supported in that manner, by whispering some of that courage to her with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered, but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all the strength and intelligence she had left, had abandoned her.

When he entered Madame's room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her cabinet. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks for the honor she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness, which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful color animated her cheeks, and her eyes, still red from the tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, and as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterized him, the disorder of the apartment, and the no less great disorder of Madame's countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, "My dear sister, at what hour to-day would you wish the repetition of the *ballet* to take place?"

Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: "Ah! sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition; I was about to send to inform you that I could not attend to-day."

"Indeed," said the king, in apparent surprise; "are you not well?"

"No, sire."

"I will summon your medical attendants, then."

"No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition."

"You alarm me."

"Sire, I wish to ask your majesty's permission to return to England."

The king started. "Return to England," he said; "do you really say what you mean?"

"I say it reluctantly, sire," replied the grand-daughter of Henry IV., firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. "I regret to have to confide such matters to your majesty, but I feel myself too unhappy at your majesty's court; and I wish to return to my own family."

"Madame, madame," exclaimed the king, as he approached her.

"Listen to me, sire," continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendancy over her interrogator which her beauty and her nervous nature conferred; "young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation, and have endured disdain here. Oh! do not contradict me, sire," she said, with a smile. The king colored.

"Then," she continued, "I had reasoned myself into the belief that Heaven called me into existence with that object, I, the daughter of a powerful monarch; that since my father had been deprived of life, Heaven could well smite my pride. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother suffering much; but I vowed that if Providence ever placed me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workwoman of the lower classes, who gains her bread by her labor, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived; I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my birth; I have even ascended again the steps of a throne, and I thought that, in allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relation, a friend, an equal; but I perceive I have found only a master, and I rebel. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I—love——"

The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear.

"You, sire, who know all, since you have come here; you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to go away. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling to exculpate and to protect me."

"My dear sister," murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, "have you reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?"

"Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack, nothing more."

"Come, tell me what have they done to you?" said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine maneuver, had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from the accused she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but notwithstanding that, all women, even the least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some such means of turning the tables. The king had forgotten that he was paying her a visit, in order to say to her, "What have you done to my brother?" and that he was reduced to weakly asking her. "What have they done to you?"

"What have they done to me!" replied Madame. "One must be a woman to understand it, sire,—they have made me shed tears;" and, with one of her fingers, whose slenderness and perfect whiteness were unequalled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming with unshed drops, and again began to weep.

"I implore you, my dear sister," said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she abandoned to him.

"In the first place, sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother's friend. The Duke of Buckingham was an agreeable, cheerful visitor; my own countryman, who knew my habits: I will say, almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James's."

"But Villiers was in love with you?"

"A pretext! What does it matter," she said seriously, "whether the duke was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah! sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman." And she

smiled so tenderly, and with so much archness, that the king felt his heart swell and throb in his breast.

"At all events, if my brother were jealous?" interrupted the king.

"Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the duke was sent away accordingly."

"No, not sent away."

"Driven away, dismissed, expelled, then, if you prefer it, sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe obliged to leave the court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of a most gallant court; but forgive me, sire; I forgot, that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power."

"I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was charmed with him."

"It was not you?" said Madame; "ah! so much the better;"—and she emphasized the "so much the better," as if she had instead said, "so much the worse."

A few minutes silence ensued. She then resumed: "The Duke of Buckingham having left—I now know why and by whose means. I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity: but, not at all, for all at once, Monsieur found another pretext; all at once——"

"All at once," said the king, playfully, "some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, and will always meet with men who will madly love you."

"In that case," exclaimed the princess, "I will create a solitude around me, which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me. But no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated. I shall have friends, without fearing they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has

lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me he can be a tyrant to a woman."

"Nay, nay, my brother's only fault is that of loving you."

"Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah! sire," and she burst out laughing. "Monsieur will never love any woman," she said; "Monsieur loves himself too much; no, unhappily for me, Monsieur's jealousy is of the worst kind—he is jealous without love."

"Confess, however," said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation;—"confess that Guiche loves you."

"Ah! sire, I know nothing about that."

"You must have perceived it. A man who loves readily betrays himself."

"M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself."

"My dear sister, you are defending M. de Guiche."

"I, indeed! Ah, sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to crown my wretchedness."

"No, madame, no," returned the king, hurriedly; "do not distress yourself. Nay, you are weeping. I implore you to calm yourself."

She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands; the king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that he felt his heart giving way under her gaze.

"You have no kind of feeling, then, for Guiche?" he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

"None—absolutely none."

"Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?"

"Nothing will satisfy him, sire. Do not believe he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of nervous disposition."

"He may well be so when you are concerned," said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, still holding her hand all the while. Their momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and, from that moment, she felt her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own.

"Monsieur complains," said the king, "that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society."

"But Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting all sorts of spiteful things against women with the Chevalier De Lorraine."

"Oh, you are going somewhat too far."

"I only tell you what is true. Do you observe for yourself, sire, and you will see that I am right."

"I will observe: but in the meantime, what satisfaction can I give my brother?"

"My departure."

"You repeat that word," exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if, during the last ten minutes, such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

"Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer," she said. "M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur. Will he be sent away too?"

"If it be necessary, why not?" replied the king, smiling.

"Well; and after M. de Guiche—whom, by the by, I shall regret—I warn you, sire."

"Ah, you will regret him?"

"Certainly; he is amiable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me."

"If Monsieur were only to hear you," said the king, slightly annoyed, "do you know I would not undertake

to make it up again between you ; nay, I would not even attempt it."

"Sire, can you, even now, prevent Monsieur from being jealous of the first person who may approach? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first."

"Again: I warn you that as a good brother I shall take a dislike to De Guiche."

"Ah, sire, do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur. Remain king; better for yourself and for every one else."

"You jest charmingly, madame; and I can well understand how the people you attack must adore you."

"And is that the reason why you, sire, whom I had regarded as my defender, are about to join these who persecute me?" said Madame.

"I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!"

"Then," she continued, languishingly, "grant me a favor."

"Whatever you wish."

"Let me return to England."

"Never, never!" exclaimed Louis XIV.

"I am a prisoner, then?"

"In France—if France is a prison,—yes."

"What must I do, then?"

"I will tell you. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unsuitable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society, do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very amiable; but if, at least, we do not possess his wit——"

"Ah, sire, you know very well you are pretending to be modest."

"No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen."

"I am sure, sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying."

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, "Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That you will no longer waste upon strangers, in your own apartments, the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?"

"An alliance with you, sire?"

"Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?"

"But are you, sire, a reliable ally?"

"You shall see, madame."

"And when shall this alliance commence?"

"This very day."

"I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it."

"Blindly."

"Then, sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance, everything will be resplendent."

"Oh, madame, madame," said Louis XIV., "you know well that there is no brilliancy that does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem."

"Sire, you flatter your ally, and you wish to deceive her," said Madame, threatening the king with her finger menacingly raised.

"What! you believe I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?"

"Yes."

"What makes you so suspicious?"

"One thing."

"What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome it."



"That one thing in question, sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven."

"Tell me what it is."

"The past."

"I do not understand, madame," said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well.

The princess took his hand in hers. "Sire," she said, "I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period, that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law."

"Displease me! You have displeased me?"

"Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well."

"Our alliance shall date from to-day," exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. "You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes: look." And he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.

"It is all the same," she murmured; "it will not be a very worthy alliance."

"Must I swear?" inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.

"Oh, I will not refuse to witness a resounding oath," said Madame; "it has always the *semblance* of security."

The king knelt upon a footstool and took Madame's hand. She, with a smile that no painter could ever succeed in depicting, and which a poet only might imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened color, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy

one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, "Nay, be comforted, gentlemen, his majesty is always pale when he is angry."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE ADVISERS.

THE king left Madame in a state of agitation it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to depict the secret play of those strange sympathies, which suddenly, and apparently without any cause, are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating? And why, not only were his thoughts occupied about her, but still more, why were they so continuously occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favor, which encouraged the belief of still greater regard. It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction; the tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least seemed to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can decide where to stop, not even the man who has in advance calculated all the chances of his own success or another's submission. As far as Madame was concerned, her regard for the king may easily be ex-

plained : she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a theater would leap over the greatest obstacles to obtain an acknowledgment of applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that, after having been adored by Buckingham, by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, even if it were only from that negative merit, so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty—it was not surprising, we say, that the princess should raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the kingdom, but was one of the handsomest and cleverest men in Europe. As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply an explanation by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and nature by means of her mysterious affinity of characters. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes in the world : Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners ; Louis, melancholy and diffident. Summoned to meet each other, for the first time, upon the grounds of interest and common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the mingling of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most attractive woman of his court. Madame left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her must remain passive, whilst the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish to see his wish fulfilled.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged ; that Madame had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him ;

but that she was of a proud, impetuous character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management.

Monsieur replied in the reticent tone of voice he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks, and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself. To this the king replied in a quick tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, "Thank heaven, Madame is above censure."

"The censure of others, certainly I admit," said Monsieur, "but not above mine, I presume."

"Well," said the king, "all I have to say, Philip, is that Madame's conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and singular, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is enriched by innocence."

"Ah!" said Monsieur, more and more piqued, "from the very moment that your majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say."

"Philip," replied the king hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, "what I have done, and what I have said, has been only for your happiness. I was told that you complained of a want of confidence and attention on Madame's part and I did not wish your uneasiness to be prolonged. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have satisfied myself, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation."

"And," continued Monsieur, in an interrogative tone of voice, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, "what your majesty has discovered for Madame—and I bow myself to your superior judgment—have you verified for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?"

"You are right, Phillip," said the king; "I will reserve that point for future consideration."

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew.

As for Louis, he went to seek his mother, for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe.

To appear in a contradictory humor, was one of the stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had learned how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria, in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and gesture, he became convinced, from certain piercing glances, and from certain skillful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria would prove most dangerous. Louis therefore changed his maneuvers. He complained of Madame, absolved Monsieur, listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had had to say of Buckingham, and

then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say all the favorites and more intimate associates, and they were numerous, since there were already five masters, were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving visits. among the number was one which he hoped and feared nearly to an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were of the most reassuring character. "Monsieur," said he to De Guiche, "was in an excellent humor, and no one could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-feeling."

For a long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided, that of Louis the Thirteenth's two sons, Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character—an uncertain, irresolute character; impulsively good, indifferently disposed at bottom; but certainly a cipher for his friends. He especially cheered De Guiche, by pointing out to him that Madame would, before long, succeed in governing her husband, and that, consequently, that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche, full of mistrust and presence of mind, replied, "Yes, chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person."

"In what respect?"

"She has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women."

"Quite true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine laughing.

"In that case, Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy."

"Deep! deep!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"But true," replied De Guiche.

Neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment he thus attacked Madame's character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart. The chevalier, while admiring De Guiche's penetration, was leading him, blindfolded, to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner.

"But I have already told you they are all laughing at it," replied the Chevalier de Lorraine, "and Monsieur himself at the head of them."

"Yet," hazarded De Guiche, "I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit."

"Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh too."

"So that——"

"So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day," said the chevalier.

"And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?"

"Certainly."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite," returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the chevalier, who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character, perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.

"I advise you to go to sleep in perfect tranquillity, my dear count."

"And my advice, De Guiche," said Raoul, "is the very opposite."

"What is that?"

"To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates; on your arrival, follow the chevalier's advice, if you like; and, what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as you please."

"What! set off!" exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; "why should De Guiche set off!"

"Because, and you cannot be ignorant of it—you particularly so—because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche."

De Guiche turned pale.

"Not at all," replied the chevalier, "not at all, and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne."

"I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, monsieur," replied Raoul, "and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend."

During this discussion, De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game, important in all its consequences for the rest of his life, was being played at that moment.

"Is it not the fact," said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself, "is it not the fact, De Guiche, that the scene was not so tempestuous as the Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think, and who, moreover, was not himself there?"

"Whether tempestuous or not," persisted Raoul, "it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, and I know that Madame has been in tears."

"Madame in tears!" exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.

"Ah!" said the chevalier, laughing, "this is indeed a circumstance I was not acquainted with. You are decidedly better informed than I am, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"And it is because I am better informed than yourself, chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche leaving."

"No, no; I regret to differ from you, vicomte; but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? tell us why."

"The king!"

"The king," exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair."

"Bah!" said the chevalier, "the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father; reflect, that, if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke."

"Why so?"

"No doubt of it; when one runs away, it is either from guilt or fear."

"Sometimes, because a man is offended; often because he is wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "We will assign as a reason for his departure, that he feels hurt and injured—nothing will be easier: we will say that we both did our utmost to keep him, and you, at least, will not be speaking otherwise than the truth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent, and, being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off."

"No, De Guiche, remain where you are," said the chevalier; "precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, vicomte: but my opinion is the very opposite to your own."

"And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, monsieur; but be assured that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration. He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning

from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips; while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may now draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee."

The chevalier smiled, and muttered to himself. "That is the very thing I wish." And at the same time he shrugged his shoulders, a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he quitted the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear.

"No, no; I have decided, Bragelonne; I stay."

"I prophesy, then," said Raoul, sadly, "that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche."

"I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, count, I say to you, remain."

"Are you sure," inquired De Guiche, "that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, you see, Raoul," continued De Guiche, endeavoring to smile, "you see the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed for internal dissensions, when dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that," said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, saying, "I have nothing to add."

"But," inquired the chevalier, curious to learn whence Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, "since you say you are well informed, vicomte, how can you be better informed than myself, who am one of the prince's most intimate companions?"

"To such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I admit; and, as a man of honor is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I will say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle."

Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a couch, whilst the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing. The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his mind. He therefore made use of his last resource.

"Madame," he said, "will be brilliant; she appears to-day in her costume of Pomona."

"Yes, that is so," exclaimed the count.

"And she has just given directions in consequence," continued the chevalier. "You know, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that the king is to appear as Spring."

"It will be admirable," said De Guiche; "and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without the king's orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet."

"I," said the chevalier, "am to be only a simple *égyptien*; true it is, I am a bad dancer, and my legs are not well made. Gentlemen, adieu. Do not forget the basket of fruit, which you are to offer to Pomona, count."

"Rest assured," said De Guiche, delightedly, "I shall forget nothing."

"I am now quite certain that he will remain," murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself.

Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away: he merely observed to the comte, in his melancholy and melodious voice, "You are embarking in a most dangerous enterprise. I know you well: you go to extremes in everything, and the lady you love does so too. Admitting for an instant that she should at last love you——"

"Oh, never!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Why do you say never?"

"Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us."

"In that case, instead of regarding you as simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you as absolutely mad."

"Why?"

"Are you perfectly sure—mind, answer me frankly—that you do not wish her whom you love to make any sacrifice for you?"

"Yes, yes; quite sure."

"Love her then at a distance."

"What! at a distance?"

"Certainly; what matters being present or absent, since you expect nothing from her. Love her portrait, a memento."

"Raoul!"

"Love a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; be devoted to the affection itself, in giving a name to your ideality."

"Ah!"

"You turn away; your servants approach. I will say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend upon me."

"Indeed I shall do so."

"Very well; that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu."

"You will not be present then at the ballet, vicomte?"

"No; I shall have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche."

The reception was to take place in the king's apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of the court, who had been carefully selected. A great number of courtiers, also selected, occupied the time, before the dancing com-

menced, in conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fête*, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted, but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilettes designed by different painters for the ballet of "The Demi-Gods," for thus were termed the kings and queens, of which Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he looked somewhat anxious; he bowed courteously to the young queen and his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly. His notice of her and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. De Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion, and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with interest. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame's glance had its customary effect of lighting up the features of the son of the Marshal de Grammont. The king's sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too that during the whole of the day, so fruitful in future events, she had acted unjustly, if not treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. In her eyes the moment seemed to have arrived for an acknowledgment to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count was sincerely pitied, and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur, nor the king, nor the Duke of Buckingham, was any longer thought of; De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. But although Monsieur also looked very handsome, still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known—indeed all women say so—that a wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides,

in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother, and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked; all these motives gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well-settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that opinion of himself. The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen, in the glance, which began to bestir the world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined the greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or made his remarks upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others wretched by a single word. Suddenly, his glance, which was smilingly directed toward Madame, detected the silent correspondence established between the princess and the count. He bit his lip, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens:—

"I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the *fêtes*. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon the profoundest silence immediately ensued. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me."

Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humor. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to

thank his majesty for the great honor which had been conferred upon them by the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah! M. de Guiche, I did not see you."

The comte bowed, and Madame turned pale. De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Comte, this is the season for farming purposes in the country, I am sure your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you."

The king, after this pitiless attack, turned his back on the poor comte, whose turn it was now to become pale: he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that the king is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed.

"I have perhaps misunderstood your majesty," he stammered out.

The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, "I said retire to your estates," allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the comte's face, his hands convulsively opened, and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother's glance, as though to show her that he was master: he sought his brother's triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken: and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame; but the princess was laughing and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She had heard nothing, or rather had pretended not to hear at all. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on also, with one of those looks of fixed hostility that seemed to give to a man's glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance. M. de Guiche was left alone in the king's

cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows seemed to dance before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the settled despair that overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own room, where Raoul awaited him, immovable in his own sad presentiments.

"Well?" he murmured, seeing his friend enter, bare-headed, with a wild gaze and tottering gait.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.

"And she?" inquired Raoul.

"She," exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand, clenched in anger towards heaven. "She!——"

"What did she say and do?"

"She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed."

A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter his nerves for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

CHAPTER LIV.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

FOR four days, every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau, had converted this spot into a place of the most perfect enjoyment. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning, there were the accounts of the previous night's expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enrolments, payments. M. Colbert had amassed four millions of francs, and dispersed them with sleepless economy. He was horrified at the expenses which mythology involved; not a wood nymph, nor a dryad, that cost less

than a hundred francs a day! The dress alone amounted to three hundred francs. The expense of powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand francs. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand francs every evening. The *fêtes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time, he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, solemn ceremonies, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame's sparkling wit and the king's magnificence were equally well displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fête*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races—Garamanthas, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and Patagonians, who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and, upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, Madame to Phœbe, the sun's sister, and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Henrietta of England, and not Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power, and love are enhanced. Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and, in effect, the king himself proclaimed its truth by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was

unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet?—This was a question she herself could hardly answer; but what she did know was, that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy. The result of all these changes, the source of which emanated from the royal will, was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had, in reality, become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for, then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening those who annoyed him. Since the departure, however, of the enemy, who had been driven away by means of his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden, heavier, but in a very different sense, to his former one. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts, etc., etc.; all this would have been sufficient to have killed, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest porter in the *château*. It is perfectly true, that, with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades, and such matters, a woman is far stronger than the most robust of porters. But however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, the Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not fail to distil drops of gall into every wound the latter received. The result was, that Monsieur—who had at first, been in the highest spirits, and completely restored since Guiche's

departure—subsided into his melancholy state, three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau.

It happened, however, that, one day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, Monsieur, who had risen late, and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention, it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to Moret, where he possessed a charming country house. He accordingly went to the queen's pavilion, and was astonished, on entering, to find none of the royal servants in attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms, a door on the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment, Monsieur was informed, by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock, for the purpose of bathing in the Seine, that a grand *fête* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been placed at the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour ago.

"Very good," said Monsieur, "the idea is a good one; the heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He desired that a couple of horses should be saddled, one for himself, and the other for his valet. The groom told him that all the horses had been sent away. Monsieur, pale with anger, again descended towards the queen's apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young and beautiful sister on her knees before the queen-mother, who appeared weeping

bitterly. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening, and listened, the sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. "Yes," she said, "the king neglects me, the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only in which I have no share."

"Patience, patience, my daughter," said Anne of Austria in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice, which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sighs and sobs, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos*, which Maria Theresa accentuated with spiteful anger.

"The baths," said Monsieur to himself, "it seems it is the baths that have put her out." And he endeavored to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand. It was easy to guess that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavored to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door, and he therefore made up his mind to cough; the two queens turned round at the sound and Monsieur entered. At sight of the prince, the young queen rose precipitately, and dried her tears. Monsieur, however, knew the people he had to deal with too well, and was naturally too polite to remain silent, and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, "What do you want, Philip?"

"I?—nothing," stammered Monsieur. "I was looking for——"

"Whom?"

"I was looking for Madame."

"Madame is at the baths."

"And the king?" said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.

"The king also, and the whole court as well," replied Anne of Austria."

"Except you, madame," said Monsieur.

Oh! I," said the young queen, "I seem to terrify all those who amuse themselves."

"And so do I,—judging from appearances," rejoined Monsieur.

Anne of Austria made a sign to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew, weeping.

Monsieur's brows contracted, as he remarked aloud, "What a cheerless house. What do you think of it, mother?"

"Why no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting."

"Yes, indeed, that is the very thing that makes those dull who do not care for pleasure."

"In what a tone you say that, Philip."

"Upon my word, madame, I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself; what is the matter?"

"Ask my sister-in-law, rather, who, just now, was detailing all her grievances to you."

"Her grievances, what——"

"Yes, I was listening; accidentally I confess, but still I listened—so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame——"

"Ah! folly!"

"No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos*, which means baths."

"I repeat, Philip," said Anne of Austria, "that your sister is childishly jealous."

"In that case, madame," replied the prince, "I, too, must with great humility, accuse myself of possessing the same defect."

"You also, Philip?"

"Certainly."

"Are you really jealous of these baths?"

"And why not, madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honor to even invite me? And you enjoin my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied, too."

"You are raving, my dear Philip," said Anne of Austria; "you have driven the Duke of Buckingham away; you have been the cause of M. de Guiche's exile; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?"

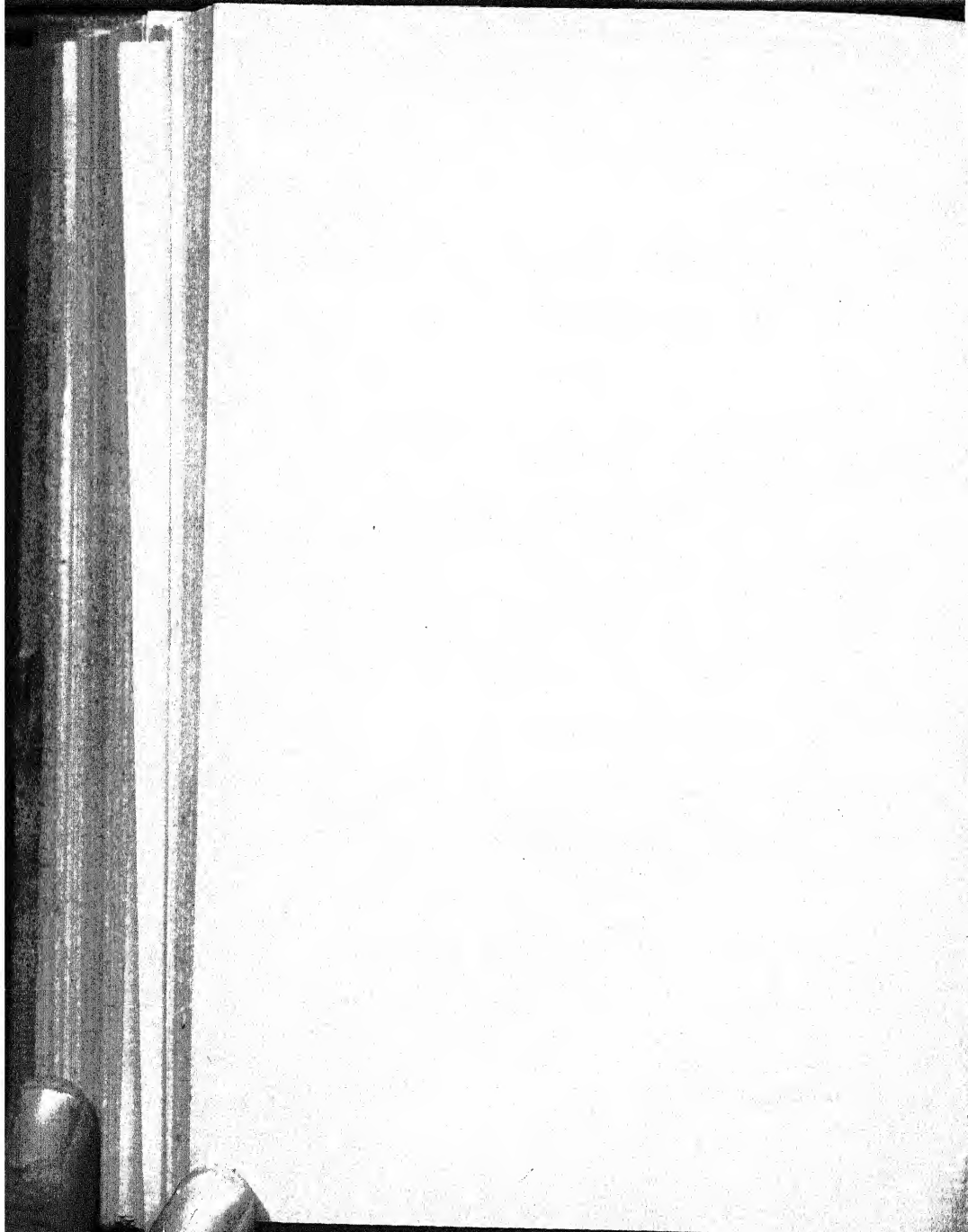
"I do not pretend to anything of the kind, madame," said Monsieur, bitterly; "but at least, *I* can withdraw, and I shall do so."

"Jealous of the king,—jealous of your brother?"

"Yes, madame, I am jealous of the king—of my own brother, and remarkably jealous too."

"Really, Monsieur," exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant, "I begin to believe you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose. I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such monomanias."

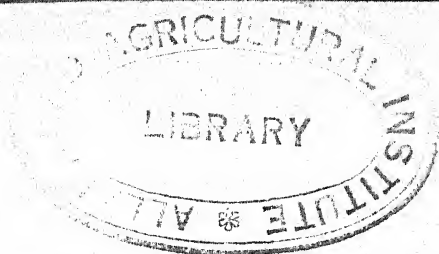
She rose and left Monsieur a prey to the most extravagant transport of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself, again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his replying that there was neither the one nor the other, Monsieur snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy, and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants' courtyard, whipping him the while, in spite of his cries and excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces some beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for some one to come to him.



THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

VOL. III.





THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER I.

THE BATH.

AT Valvins, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat-bottomed boat, with ladders covered with long blue curtains, served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Acteons, who, eagerly, and full of admiration, galloped up and down the flowery banks of the river. But Diana herself, even the chaste Diana, clothed in her long chlamys, was less beautiful—less impenetrable, than Madame, as young and beautiful as that goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and delicate knee can be seen; and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders can be detected; whereas, in Madame's case, a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times, as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered inaccessible to the most indiscreet, as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets who were present—and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion—the twenty poets who were galloping about, stopped, and with one voice ex-

claimed, that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the center of these effusions, and of this respectful homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, for whom it seemed impossible to exhaust their raptures, and he rode away, for fear of offending, even through the silken curtains, the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and perfect silence in the boat. From the movements on board—from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains—the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties, could be guessed.

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the courtiers around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little, if any, attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings drawn along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed, and that the goddess was about to make her reappearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose duty or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses; the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who, while their masters had been bathing, had mutually exchanged their own observations, critical remarks, and the discussion of matters personal—the fugitive journal of that period, of which no one now remembers anything, not even by the waves, the witnesses of what went on that day—their own now sublimed into immensity, as the actors have vanished into eternity.

A crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants drawn

together by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, was, for many minutes, the most disorderly, but the most agreeable, mob imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse, a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers, and offered his hand to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her fine figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woolen cloth embroidered with silver. Her hair, still damp and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts, under a lace parasol, which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-colored shade of the parasol, the king, whose white teeth were displayed in continual smiles, and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk. When Madame approached her horse, a magnificent animal of Andalusian breed, of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and splendid head, in which the mixture, happily combined, of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground; and as the princess affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of alabaster around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess, having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at the same moment. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners, to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint etiquette had imposed upon them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after the carriages which bore

the maids of honor, as blooming as so many virgin huntresses around Diana, and the human whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame, however, kept their horses in hand at a foot-pace. Behind his majesty and his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers—those, at least, who were seriously disposed or were anxious to be within reach, or under the eyes, of the king—followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by that of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can, with perfect courtesy, make a thousand atrocious, but laughable remarks about their neighbors. In their stifled laughter, and in the little reticences of their sardonic humor, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied, and bewailed greatly, the fate of De Guiche, and it must be confessed that their compassion, as far as he was concerned, was not misplaced. The king and Madame having breathed the horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers, who supplied them with talk, suggested to them, set off at a hand gallop, and the leafy coverts of the forest resounded to the footfalls of the mounted party. To the conversations beneath the shade of trees,—to remarks made in the shape of confidential communications, and observations, mysteriously exchanged, succeeded the noisiest bursts of laughter;—from the very outriders to royalty itself, merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays fluttered away uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving avenues of oaks; the cuckoo staid his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinch and tomtit flew; while the terrified deer bounded riverwards from the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading joy, confusion, and light wherever

it passed, was heralded, it may be said, to the château by its own clamor. As the king and Madame entered the village, they were received by the acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this joy. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them—one especially—a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur's apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand, led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what was the nature of the conversation which took place between them, or rather what it was that the queen-mother said to Louis XIV.; but the general tenor of the interview might certainly be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king's face as he left her.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers,—we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed, at least we hope so, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE BUTTERFLY-CHASE.

THE king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilette-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read—"Come quickly, I have

a thousand things to say to you." The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the route which separated Valvins from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilette, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with the ladies of her suite. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments and had gone for a walk in the gardens, he collected all the gentlemen he could find, and invited them to follow him. He found Madame engaged in chasing butterflies, on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to a high hedge, very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, with whom she had appointed the rendezvous. The sound of many feet upon the gravel-walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was hatless: he had struck down with his cane a peacock butterfly, which Monsieur de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the ground quite stunned.

"You see, Madame," said the king, as he approached her, "that I, too, am hunting on your behalf!" and then, turning towards those who had accompanied him, said, "Gentlemen, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies," a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might have been observed; old and corpulent courtiers were seen running after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have done the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both

selected, as the center of observation, a bench with a roof of boards and moss, a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of one of the gardeners who had inaugurated the picturesque and fanciful amid the formal style of gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened the bench, so that the spectators, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to those who were running about; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, "How admirably we are placed here for conversation."

"Yes, sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one."

"And I also," said Louis.

"My note surprised you?"

"Terrified me rather. But what I have to tell you is more important."

"It cannot be, sire. Do you know that Monsieur refuses to see me?"

"Why so?"

"Can you not guess why?"

"Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other."

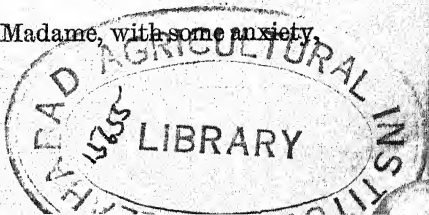
"What has happened to you, then?"

"You wish me to begin?"

"Yes, for I have told you all."

"Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments."

"The queen-mother?" said Madame, with some anxiety, "the matter is serious, then."



"Indeed it is, for she told me . . . but, in the first place, allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?"

"Often."

"Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?"

"More frequently still."

"Of his jealousy of me?"

"No, but of the Duke of Buckingham and De Guiche."

"Well, Madame, Monsieur's present idea is a jealousy of myself."

"Really," replied the princess, smiling archly.

"And it really seems to me," continued the king, "that we have never given any ground——"

"Never! at least *I* have not. But who told you that Monsieur was jealous?"

"My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman, that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and—forgive me for saying it—against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice, too."

"You are very kind, sire."

"My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it."

"Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?"

"The very thing I said."

"Confess, sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other's company, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For indeed, sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any." And she looked at the king with that proud yet provoking glance that kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.

"No!" sighed the king, "that is true."

"You know very well, sire, that if it were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct."

"Oh, certainly—perfectly correct."

"Often alone together,—for we delight in the same things, we might possibly be led away into error, but *have* we been? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more."

The king frowned. She continued :—

"Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which is the case with those who love each other, for instance——"

"Enough," said the king, "enough, I entreat you. You have no pity—you are killing me."

"What is the matter?"

"In fact, then, you distinctly say you experience nothing when near me."

"Oh, sire! I don't say that—my affection——"

"Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you. If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself."

"I do not understand you, sire."

"Very well," sighed the king, casting down his eyes. "And so our meetings, the pressure of each other's hand, the looks we have exchanged—Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning," and he buried his face in his hands.

"Take care, sire," said Madame, hurriedly, "Monsieur de Saint-Aignan is looking at you."

"Of course," said Louis, angrily; "never even the shadow of liberty! never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, who is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, who is only a—sister!"

Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes.

"My husband is jealous," she murmured, in a tone of which nothing could equal its sweetness and its charm.

"You are right," exclaimed the king, suddenly.

"You see," she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, "you are free, you are not suspected, the peace of your house is not disturbed."

"Alas," said the king, "as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous."

"Maria Theresa!"

"Stark mad with jealousy! Monsieur's jealousy arises from hers; she was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was reproaching us for those bathing parties, which have made me so happy."

"And me too," answered Madame, by a look.

"When, suddenly," continued the king, "Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word '*banos*,' which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness, that awakened his attention; he entered the room, looking quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to leave him; so that, while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me a specter of jealousy with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks."

"Poor king," murmured Madame, as she lightly touched the king's hand. He retained her hand in his, and, in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with the butterflies that they could not occupy themselves about other matters, and who perceived clearly enough that there was some mystery in the king's and Madame's conversation.

Louis placed the dying butterfly before his sister-in-law, and both bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes of its wings, or the particles of golden dust which covered it. Neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breath united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other's grasp. Five minutes passed in this manner.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT WAS CAUGHT AFTER THE BUTTERFLIES.

THE two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed, as it were, beneath the double thought of the love which was springing up in their hearts, and which gives birth to so many happy fancies in the imaginations of twenty years of age. Henrietta gave a side glance, from time to time, at the king. Hers was one of those finely-organized natures capable of looking inwardly at itself, as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived Love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skillful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew Louis was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "And so?" she said, interrogatively, breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean, that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."

"To what resolution?"

"To that which I have already submitted to your majesty."

"When?"

"On the very day we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."

"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, sire?"

"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."

"A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, sire," replied Madame Henrietta; "but as it is necessary, I must submit to it."

"At least, tell me what it is," said the king.

"Absence."

"Still that unkind resolve?"

"Believe me, sire, I have not formed it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary I should return to England."

"Never, never will I permit you to leave France," exclaimed the king.

"And yet, sire," said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, "nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded it is your mother's desire I should do so."

"Desire!" exclaimed the king: "that is a very strange expression to use to me."

"Still," replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, "are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?"

"Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul."

"I?"

"Yes; for you speak of your departure with tranquillity."

"I was not born for happiness, sire," replied the princess, dejectedly; "and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest wishes disappointed."

"Do you speak truly?" said the king. "Would your departure gainsay any one of your cherished thoughts?"

"If I were to say 'yes,' would you begin to take your misfortune patiently?"

"How cruel you are!"

"Take care, sire; some one is coming."

The king looked all round him, and said, "No, there is no one," and then continued: "Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur's jealousy by a departure which would kill me——" Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders like a woman unconvinced. "Yes," repeated Louis, "which would kill me, I say. Instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination—or rather does not your heart—suggest some expedient?"

"What is it you wish my heart to suggest?"

"Tell me, how can one prove to another that it is wrong to be jealous?"

"In the first place, sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, in loving no one but the person in question."

"Oh! I expected more than that."

"What did you expect?"

"That you would simply tell me that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of jealousy."

"Dissimulation is difficult, sire."

"Yet it is only by means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. As far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me by pretending to treat you like any other woman."

"A bad, as well as an unsafe, means," said the young princess, shaking her pretty head.

"You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta," said Louis, discontentedly. "You negative everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead. Come, try and think. I trust implicitly to a woman's invention. Do you invent in your turn?"

"Well, sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?"

"Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen."

"Well, I judge of it by my own case. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else."

"What would that be?"

"In the first place to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question."

"Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now."

"Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured on the subject, I should like to see him occupy himself with some one else."

"Ah! I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is at least ingenious, it is hardly charitable."

"Why so?"

"In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person's mind, you inflict one upon the heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists; and that seems to me to be far worse."

"Agreed; but he does not detect, he does not suspect the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, sire, who, except yourself, has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a melancholy crew of grumblers always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you never can remove their sufferings. It is a disease which lies in the imagination, and, like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon

this subject, of poor Dr. Dawley, a clever and amusing man, who, had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say, 'Whenever you are likely to suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble, and I will allow you to retain it; for it is positive,' he said, 'that that very ailment is of the greatest service to me, in order to enable me to get rid of the other.' "

"Well and judiciously remarked, Henrietta," replied the king, smiling.

"Oh! we have some clever people in London, sire."

"And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley, or whatever you call him, a pension for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of your evils. You do not answer—you smile. I guess that the least of your bugbears is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this misfortune; and, in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both."

"Hush! this time some one is really coming," said Madame; and she stooped to gather a flower from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for, suddenly, a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the hillock, following the cavaliers—the cause of this irruption being a magnificent hawk-moth, with wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bank on which Louis and Madame Henrietta were reclining; and leaned her back against a magnificent oak tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful, and the gentlemen, accordingly, deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success, pressed in a circle around her. The king and the princess looked gloomily at this scene, as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children. "They seem to be amusing themselves there," said the king.

"Greatly, sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found."

"What do you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?" inquired the king.

"I think she has rather too much flax-yellow and lily-whiteness in her complexion," replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan.

"Rather too fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."

"Is that your opinion, sire?"

"Yes, really."

"Very well; and it is mine, too."

"And she seems to be much sought after."

"Oh, that is a matter of course. Lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of butterflies, you can see, from those who surround her, what successful sport we should have had."

"Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers, and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous, in such a case?"

"Oh! sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh. "She would cure a jealous man, certainly; but she might possibly make a woman jealous, too."

"Henrietta," exclaimed Louis, "you fill my heart with joy. Yes, yes; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak."

"A king's cloak," said Madame Henrietta, smiling, "ought to be beautiful."

"Do you advise me to do it, then?" inquired Louis.

"I! what should I say, sire, except that to give such an advice would be to supply arms against myself. It would be folly or pride to advise you to take, for the heroine of an assumed affection, a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard."

The king tried to take Madame's hand in his own; his eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words so full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone, that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said, "Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our jealous friend. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me. Towards her, I will direct the glance I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to be able to rouse you from your indifference. But, be careful in your selection, lest, in offering her the rose which I may have plucked, I find myself conquered by you; and my looks, my hand, my lips, turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret."

While these words escaped from the king's lips, in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. "I shall fail," she said, raising her beautiful black eyes, "but not as you beg me, for all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of an-

other divinity, ah! sire, I too shall be jealous of, and want restored to me; and would not that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image intact and unshadowed in your heart."

"Happily for me," said the king, "your heart is not hard and unfeeling. If it were so, I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Precautions were taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable looking face."

Whilst the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat, looked around the greensward, and after a careful and silent examination, she called the king to her side, and said, "See yonder, sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that group of Guelder roses, that beautiful girl walking alone, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers, which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought."

"Mademoiselle de Vallière, do you mean?" remarked the king.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Will she not suit you, sire?"

"Why, look how thin the poor child is. She has hardly any flesh upon her bones."

"Nay: am I stout then?"

"She is so melancholy."

"The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively."

"She is lame."

"Do you really think so?"

"No doubt of it. Look; she has allowed every one to pass by her, through fear of her defect being remarked."

"Well, she will not run so fast as Daphné, and will not be as able to escape Apollo."

"Henrietta," said the king, out of temper; "of all your maids of honor, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects."

"Still she is one of my maids of honor."

"Of course; but what do you mean?"

"I mean that, in order to visit this new divinity, you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that, as propriety will forbid your conversing with her in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak as it were, at me, while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous, will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will go there for Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Who happens to be lame."

"Hardly that."

"Who never opens her lips."

"But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth."

"Who may serve as a model for an osteologist."

"Your favor will change her appearance."

"Henrietta!"

"At all events you allowed me to choose."

"Alas! yes."

"Well, my choice is made: I impose her upon you, and you must submit."

"Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it."

"La Vallière is as gentle as a lamb: do not fear she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her," said Madame, laughing.

"You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?"

"It would be for my sake."

"The treaty is agreed to, then?"

"Not only so, but signed."

"You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?"

"I will preserve for you intact, a heart that has already become accustomed to beat only at your command."

"Very well, do you not see that we have guaranteed the future by this means?"

"I hope so."

"Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?"

"Yes."

"Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversation held in foreign languages, because he always thinks he is being ill spoken of? and lastly," continued the princess, "will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king when the truth is, we can offer nothing to each other, except absolute sympathy, free from mental reservation?"

"Yes, yes," said the king, hesitatingly. "But other things may still be said of us."

"What can be said, sire? shall we never be left in tranquillity?"

"People will say I am deficient in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?"

"In comparison with my honor, sire, and that of our family, you mean. Besides, I beg you to attend, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Vallière. She is slightly lame, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold."

"Well, Madame, rest assured of one thing, namely, that I am still grateful to you: you might even yet make me pay dearer for your stay in France."

"Sire, some one approaches."

"Well!"

"One last word."

"Say it."

"You are prudent and judicious, sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence, and all your judgment."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louis, laughing, "from this very day I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to represent the character of a tender swain. After luncheon, there will be a promenade in the forest, and then there is supper and the ballet at ten o'clock."

"I know it."

"The ardor of my passion shall blaze more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than our friend Colbert's lamps; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it."

"Take care, sire, take care."

"In heaven's name what have I done, then?"

"I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent! you wise! did I say? why you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies? Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch, such as you are, without any preparation, fall at the feet of a girl like La Vallière?"

"Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already."

"No, I am only recalling you to common-sense ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove's thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its commencements. If you are so easily excited, no one will believe you are really captivated,

and every one will think you out of your senses—if even, indeed, the truth itself be not guessed. The public is not so fatuous as they seem.”

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for sense, and the very reverse for cleverness. He bowed, and said: “Agreed, madame, I will think over my plan of attack: great military men—my cousin De Condé, for instance—grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans, before they move one of the pawns, which people call armies; I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of campaign; for, you know, that the tender passion is subdivided in a variety of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love-Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear enough, you know, and poor Madame de Scudéry would never forgive me for passing through a halting-place without stopping.”

“Oh! now we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu, sire?”

“Alas! it must be so, for, see we are interrupted.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Henrietta, “they are bringing Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly in grand procession this way.”

“It is perfectly well understood, then, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and find La Vallière without you.”

“I will take care to send her away.”

“Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her.”

“Be skillful,” said Madame, laughing, “and do not miss the heart.”

Then the princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony, and a great many pretended flourishes of trumpets, imitated with their mouths.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALLET OF THE SEASONS.

At the conclusion of the banquet, which was served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which was the result of so much imagination, and had cost so many efforts of thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform it. The king had resolved to make it a surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference, and entered his own apartment, than he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, Villeroy and Saint-Aignan to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to be sure of fine weather and a favorable night before these orders could be carried out. The king opened his window; the pale-gold hues of evening were visible on the horizon through the vistas of the wood, and the moon, white as snow, was already mounting the heavens. Not a ripple on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves, even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed inspirations of the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things, and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan awaited; but with a view of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two

gentlemen in the following manner:—"Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."

"Ah! very well!"

"Yes, sire, and M. Colbert said he would wait upon your majesty, as soon as your majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the *fêtes*, of which he has furnished the programme.

"Let him come in, then," said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of keeping himself *au courant* with the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name to the two courtiers.

"Ah! M. Colbert," said the king. "Gentlemen, to your posts," whereupon Saint-Aignan and Villeroy took their leave. The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying: "The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert."

"In that case, sire, I will pay all accounts to-morrow."

"Why so?"

"I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day following that on which the ballet should take place."

"Very well, M. Colbert, pay them, since you have promised to do so."

"Certainly, sire; but I must have money to do that."

"What! have not the four millions, which M. Fouquet promised been sent? I forgot to ask you about it."

"Sire, they were sent at the hour promised."

"Well?"

"Well, sire, the colored lamps, the fireworks, the musicians, and the cooks, have swallowed up four millions in eight days."

"Entirely?"

"To the last penny. Every time your majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins."

"Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money?"

"I have no more, sire, but M. Fouquet has," Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis.

"We have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has given them with too much grace not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply."

The king frowned. "M. Colbert," said he, accentuating the financier's name, "that is not the way I understood the matter; I do not wish to make use, against any of my servants, of a means of pressure which may oppress him and fetter his services. In eight days, M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good round sum."

Colbert turned pale. "And yet," he said, "your majesty did not use this language some time ago, when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance."

"You are right, M. Colbert."

"Nothing, however, has changed since then; on the contrary, indeed."

"In my thoughts, monsieur, everything is changed."

"Does your majesty then no longer believe the disloyal attempt?"

"My affairs concern myself alone, monsieur; and I have already told you I transact them without interference."

"Then, I perceive," said Colbert, trembling with anger and fear, "that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your majesty."

"Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me."

"Yet, sire," said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis's self-esteem, "what use is there in being agreeable to your majesty, if one can no longer be of any use?"

"I reserve your services for a better occasion; and believe me, they will only be the better appreciated."

"Your majesty's plan, then, in this affair, is——"

"You want money, M. Colbert?"

"Seven hundred thousand francs, sire."

"You will take them from my private treasure." Colbert bowed. "And," added Louis, "as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray, with so limited a sum, the expenses which I intend to incur, I will at once sign an order for three millions."

The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed it to Colbert. "Be satisfied, M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king," said Louis XIV., who pronounced these words with all the majesty he knew how to assume in such circumstances; and dismissed Colbert for the purpose of giving an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout the whole of Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew how to hold a needle, every one who could distinguish a coat from a pair of trousers, was summoned to the assistance of those who had received invitations. The king had completed his toilette by nine o'clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with

branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent dais or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theater of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the building; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets, erected the seats; and, as if at the wave of an enchanter's wand, a thousand arms, aiding, instead of interfering with each other, had constructed the building, amidst the sound of music; whilst, at the same time, other workmen illuminated the theater and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of lamps. As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods, and as if Nature itself had yielded complacently to the king's fancies, the back of the theater had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky, glittering with stars; the sheet of water, illumined by the lights which were reflected in it; and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods, with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the theater was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones; in which, however, at the first glance, no single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the sight became accustomed to so much brilliancy, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theatre represented a grove of trees; a few fauns lifting up their cloven feet were jumping about; a dryad made her appearance on the scene, and was immediately pursued by them; others gathered round her for her defense, and they quarreled as they danced. Suddenly, for the purpose of restoring peace and order, Spring,

accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, hastened to follow their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, allies of Spring, followed him closely, to form a quadrille, which, after many words of more or less flattering import, was the commencement of the dance. The music, hautboys, flutes, and viols, was delightfully descriptive of rural delights. The king had already made his appearance, amid thunders of applause. He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his graceful and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best-shaped at court, were displayed to great advantage in flesh-colored silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, imprisoned his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base; Louis' waving hair floated on his shoulders, the freshness of his complexion was enhanced by the brilliancy of his beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles. Such was the prince of that period: justly that evening styled "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant movements of an immortal, and he did not dance so much as seem to soar along. His entrance produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavoring to approach either the king or Madame.

The princess—who was robed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of skillful Mechlin workers, one knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her little feet encased in silken slippers decked with pearls—advanced radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortège* of Bacchantes,

and had already reached the spot assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the comte had ample leisure to join the king.

"What is the matter, Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"Nothing whatever," replied the courtier, as pale as death; but your majesty has not thought of Fruits."

"Yes; it is suppressed."

"Far from it, sire; your majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."

"How excessively annoying," said the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Ah, sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."

"But, come, since——"

"Oh, sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but——"

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning, "here? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sire; and ready-dressed for the ballet."

The king felt himself color deeply, and said, "You are probably mistaken."

"So little is that the case, sire, that if your majesty will look to the right, you will see that the comte is in waiting."

Louis turned hastily towards the side, and in fact, on his right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche awaited until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To give an idea of the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box,—to describe also the agitated move-

ment of the heads in the theater, and the strange emotion of Madame, at the sight of her partner,—is a task we must leave to abler hands. The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the comte, who, bowing lowly, approached Louis with the profoundest respect.

“Sire,” he said, “your majesty’s most devoted servant approaches to perform a service on this occasion with similar zeal to that he has already shown on the field of battle. Your majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the substance of so dark a shadow to your majesty’s elegance, skill, and graceful invention; and I have left my tenants in order to place my services at your majesty’s commands.”

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.’s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche’s courage had astonished him, and he simply replied: “I did not tell you to return, comte.”

“Certainly not, sire; but your majesty did not tell me to remain.”

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if this strange scene were prolonged it would complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would effectually spoil the whole. Besides, the king’s heart was filled with two or three new ideas; he had just derived fresh inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Her look had said to him. “Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not object to either in particular.” So that Madame, by this clever diversion, decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame’s dumb language, but he remarked that she pretended not to look at him, and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess’s kindness of heart. The king seemed pleased

with every one present. Monsieur was the only one who did not understand anything about the matter. The ballet began ; the effect was more than beautiful. When the music, by its bursts of melody, carried away these illustrious dancers, when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, only the more natural on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph, the theater shook with tumultuous applause.

De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun, that is resigned to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgment, he thought of nothing but boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into regret and uneasiness ; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his sides, and his head drooped as though he was stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a look upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche soon ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier : without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all, by which accident the triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

CHAPTER V.

THE NYMPHS OF THE PARK OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

THE king remained for a moment to enjoy a triumph as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little in her turn. Young persons love with more vivacity,

perhaps with greater ardor and deeper passion, than others more advanced in years; but all the other feelings are at the same time developed in proportion to their youth and vigor: so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had studiously thought of himself: and Madame carefully thought of herself, without bestowing a single thought upon the king. The victim, however, of all these royal affections and affectations, was poor De Guiche. Every one could observe his agitation and prostration—a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head bewildered, and eyes with all their bright intelligence bedimmed. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion; and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like tact and ability. But there were others—keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court—who remarked his paleness and his altered looks; which he could neither feign nor conceal, and their conclusion was that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and remarks, were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause. When, however, the queens had expressed their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and whilst Monsieur, dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be, was in his turn, dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theater, was waiting for the second part, and

had quitted the others for the purpose of creating a sort of solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate, as it were, beforehand, upon chorographic effects : and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in deep meditation, she did not see, or rather pretended not to notice, anything that was passing around her. De Guiche, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honor, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect, whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal highness ; but, whether she did or did not observe his salutations, the princess did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through poor De Guiche ; he was unprepared for such utter indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgment, he advanced one step further, and in a voice which he tried, though vainly, to render calm, said : “I have the honor to present my most humble respects to your royal highness.”

Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languishingly towards the comte, observing. “Ah ! M. de Guiche, is that you ? good-day !”

The comte’s patience almost forsook him, as he continued,—“Your royal highness danced just now most charmingly.”

“Do you think so ?” she replied with indifference.

“Yes ; the character which your royal highness assumed is in perfect harmony with your own.”

Madame again turned round, and, looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said,—“Why so ?”

“Oh ! there can be no doubt of it.”

"Explain yourself?"

"You represented a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, inconstant."

"You mean Pomona, comte?"

"I allude to the goddess."

Madame remained silent for a moment, with her lips compressed, and then observed,—“But comte, you, too, are an excellent dancer.”

“Nay, madame, I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed.”

With this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibers of one's being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly, and withdrew behind the thicket. The only reply Madame condescended to make was by slightly raising her shoulders, and, as her ladies of honor had discreetly retired while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais.

“Did you hear what the Comte de Guiche said?” the princess inquired.

“No.”

“It really is very singular,” she continued, in a compassionate tone, “how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche's wit.” And then, in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said,—“In the first place he danced badly, and afterwards his remarks were very silly.”

She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fête* by his annoyance, he fled from the

scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, with all the other artificial attributes of his assumed divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he returned to the theater; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his great excitement that enabled him to go back; or perhaps, for love is thus strangely constituted, he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart. Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look at De Guiche, who, irritated and revengeful, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs, and followed by a hundred flatterers. During this time, at the other end of the theater, near the lake, a young woman was seated, with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theater, from which were issuing streams of light—the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche quitted the theater for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this figure and saluted her. When she perceived the young man, she rose, like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognized her, and said hurriedly, —“Good-evening, Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you.”

“I, also, M. de Guiche, am glad of this accidental meeting,” said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw.

“Pray do not leave me,” said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, “for you would be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you: the evening is most lovely. You wish to escape from the merry tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are

possessed of any feeling do, and one never finds them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh! Heaven!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What is the matter, monsieur le comte?" inquired La Vallière, with some anxiety. "You seem agitated."

"I! oh, no!"

"Will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity. It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honor."

"Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself. Do you love any one?"

"I!" exclaimed La Vallière.

"Forgive me, I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me; Madame was right, quite right, this brutal exile has completely turned my brain."

"And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness."

"Do you think so? Received me with kindness—perhaps so—yes——"

"There cannot be a doubt he received you kindly, for, in fact you returned without his permission."

"Quite true, and I believe you are right. But have you not seen M. de Bragelonne here?"

La Vallière started at the name. "Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Have I offended you again?" said De Guiche. "In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied."

"Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, Monsieur de Guiche, for you seem to be suffering terribly."

"Oh! mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister, or a true friend, such as yourself?"

"You have friends, Monsieur de Guiche, and the Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of the most devoted."

"Yes, yes, you are right, he is one of my best friends. Farewell, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, farewell." And he fled, like one possessed, along the banks of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the illumined yews and glittering undulations of the water. La Vallière looked after him, saying,—"Yes, yes, he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why."

She had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of nymphs; delighted with the beautiful night, and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion.

"What, already here!" they said to her. "We thought we should be first at the rendezvous."

"I have been here this quarter of an hour," replied La Vallière.

"Did not the dancing amuse you?"

"No."

"But surely the enchanting spectacle?"

"No more than the dancing. As far as beauty is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by, as though it were an eye, in color like a midnight rainbow, sometimes open, at others closed."

"La Vallière is quite a poetess," said Tonnay-Charente.

"In other words," said Montalais, "she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little, or of amusing ourselves, La Vallière begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because, perhaps, we have

mislaïd our dresses, or because our vanity has been wounded, or our costume fails to produce an effect, La Vallière laughs."

"As far as I am concerned, that is not my character," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. "I am a woman; and there are few like me; whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me: and whoever pleases——"

"Well!" said Montalais, "you do not finish."

"It is too difficult," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly. "Do you, who are so clever, finish for me."

"And you, Louise?" said Montalais, "does any one please you?"

"That is a matter which concerns no one but myself," replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet lasted. "Now, mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us, and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is lovely. Look yonder, do you not see the moon slowly rising, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks. Oh! beautiful walk! sweet liberty! exquisite soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! let us walk arm-in-arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled, or harnessed to the carriages—the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, we shall soon reach some retired spot where no eye can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Chaverney and of Chambord, the innumerable rustling poplars of Blois, where we exchanged our mutual hopes?"

"And confidences too?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. "I also think a good deal ; but I take care——"

"To say nothing," said Montalais, "so that when Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenais is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I hear steps approaching from this side."

"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass," said Montalais ; "stoop, Athenais, you are so tall."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told, and, almost at the same moment, they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm-in-arm, on the fine gravel-walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had, indeed, made themselves small—indeed invisible.

"It is Monsieur de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.

"It is Monsieur de Bragelonne," whispered the latter to La Vallière.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated tones. "She was here just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be a vision, but I spoke to her."

"You are positive, then?"

"Yes ; but perhaps I frightened her."

"In what way?"

"Oh ! I was still half crazy at you know what ; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have grown alarmed."

"Oh !" said Bragelonne, "do not make yourself uneasy : she is all kindness, and will excuse you ; she is clear-sighted, and will understand."

"Yes, but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk."

"You do not know Louise, count," said Raoul. "Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single fault." And the two young men passed on, and, as they proceeded, their voices were soon lost in the distance.

"How is it, La Vallière," said Mademoiselle de Tonny-Charente, "that the Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?"

"We were brought up together," replied Louise, blushing; "M. de Bragelonne has honored me by asking my hand in marriage, but——"

"Well?"

"It seems the king will not consent to it."

"Eh! Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?" exclaimed Aure sharply. "Good gracious! has the king any right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne, marry him: *I give my consent.*"

Athenais began to laugh.

"Oh! I am speaking seriously," replied Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king's, I suppose; is it not, Louise?"

"Come," said La Vallière, "these gentlemen have passed; let us take advantage of our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods."

"So much the better," said Athenais, "because I see the torches setting out from the château and the theater, and they seem as if they were preceding some person of distinction."

"Let us run, then," said all three. And, gracefully lifting up the long skirts of their silk dresses, they lightly ran across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais agile as a deer, Athenais eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass, and, now and then, some bold Acteon might, by the aid

of the faint light, have perceived their straight and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Vallière, more refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her ; retarded also by the lameness of her foot, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment, a man, concealed in a dry ditch planted with young willow saplings, scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the château. The three young girls, on their side, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame's and the queen's carriages could be heard in the distance upon the hard dry ground of the roads, followed by the mounted cavaliers. Distant music reached them in response, and when the soft notes died away, the nightingale, with throat of pride, poured forth his melodious chants, and his most complicated, learned, and sweetest compositions, to those who had met beneath the thick covert of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the large trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl, attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fête* of the whole court was a *fête* also for the mysterious inhabitants of the forest ; for certainly the deer in the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole, were all listening. One could realize the life led by this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements that suddenly took place among the leaves. Our sylvan nymphs uttered a slight cry, but, reassured immediately afterwards, they laughed, and resumed their walk. In this manner they reached the royal oak, the venerable relic of a tree which in its prime

had listened to the sighs of Henry the Second for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry the Fourth for the lovely Gabrielle D'Estrées. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had seat more luxuriously rested the wearied limbs of man or monarch. The trunk, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched upwards to the sky.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WAS SAID UNDER THE ROYAL OAK.

THE softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls an engagement to change immediately their giddy conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively,—Montalais, for instance,—was the first to yield to the influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying:—"What happiness to be here alone, and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards one another."

"Yes," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes, or the glitter of its diamonds."

"I," replied La Vallière, "I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent."

"You will not remain long in favor," said Montalais; "it is not here, as it was at Blois, where we told the dowager Madame all our little annoyances, and all our

longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and, on those days, whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or, at least, the rumors of them that had spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?"

"Ah, Montalais,—laughter-loving Montalais!" cried La Vallière; "you see you are sighing again; the woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."

"You ought not, either of you," said Athenaïs, "to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors, severely denounce."

"Oh, Athenaïs!" said Louise, blushing.

"Athenaïs is frank to-night," said Montalais; "let us avail ourselves of it."

"Yes, let us take advantage of it, for this evening I could divulge the softest secrets of my heart."

"Ah, if M. Montespan were here!" said Montalais.

"Do you think that I care for M. de Montespan?" murmured the beautiful young girl.

"He is handsome, I believe?"

"Yes. And that is no small advantage in my eyes."

"There now, you see——"

"I will go further, and say, that of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest, and the most——"

"What was that?" said La Vallière, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

"A deer hurrying by, perhaps."

"I am only afraid of men," said Athenaïs.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan."

"A truce to railery. M. de Montespan is attentive to

me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here, he who is so devoted to Madame?"

"Poor fellow!" said La Vallière.

"Why to be pitied?" Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of high enough rank, I suppose."

La Vallière shook her head sorrowfully, saying, "when one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank;—when one loves it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him, or of her whom one loves."

Montalais began to laugh loudly. "Heart, eyes," she said; "oh, sugar-plums!"

"I speak for myself," replied La Vallière.

"Noble sentiments," said Athenaïs, with an air of protection, but with indifference.

"Are they not your own?" asked Louise.

"Perfectly so; but to continue: how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count's side."

"Oh! no, no," returned La Vallière; "it is on Madame's side."

"Explain yourself."

"I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, from which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure forms the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche loves this illustrious personage, but she will never love him."

Athenaïs laughed disdainfully. "Do people really ever love?" she said. "Where are the noble sentiments you just now uttered? Does not a woman's virtues consist in the uncompromising refusal of every intrigue that might compromise her? A properly-regulated woman, endowed with a natural heart, ought to look at men, make herself

loved—adored, even, by them, and say at the very utmost but once in her life, ‘I begin to think that I ought not to have been what I am,—I should have detested this one less than others.’”

“Therefore,” exclaimed La Vallière, “that is what M. de Montespan has to expect.”

“Certainly ; he, as well as every one else. What ! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough ? My dear child, a woman is a queen during the entire period nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power—from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we only have that left——”

“Oh, oh !” murmured La Vallière.

“Excellent,” cried Montalais ; “a very masterly woman ; Athenaïs, you will make your way in the world.”

“Do you not approve of what I say ?”

“Completely,” replied her laughing companion.

“You are not serious, Montalais ?” said Louise.

“Yes, yes ; I approve everything Athenaïs has just said ; only——”

“Only *what* ?”

“Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles ; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child’s play ; but, when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them.”

“Your courage fails ?” said Athenaïs, scornfully.

“Miserably so.”

“Great weakness of nature,” returned Athenaïs. “But at least you make a choice.”

“Why, no. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything ; I dream of emperors, and I find only——”

“Aure, Aure !” exclaimed La Vallière, “for pity’s sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty,

sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection."

"Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that; those who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one, but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it."

"You are right," said Athenais, "and, perhaps, you too will reach the goal. In other words, young ladies, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term of coquetry, a woman's pride, and love of changing her sentiments as she does her dress. I, for instance, am proud; that is to say, impregnable. I treat my admirers harshly, but without any pretension to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think I care for them. Other women—Montalais, for instance—have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery; they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted."

"A very learned dissertation," said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.

"It is odious!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to that sort of coquetry, for, indeed, that is genuine coquetry," continued Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente; "the lover who, a little while since, was puffed up with pride, in a minute afterwards is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was, perhaps, already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he retreats defeated; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself once more. The result of all this is, that, instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome, free from restraint in his conduct toward us, we have a lover always

trembling in our presence, always fascinated by our attractions, always submissive ; and for this simple reason, that he finds the same woman never twice of the same mind. Be convinced, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one's heart and mind in check."

"How clever you are," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!"

"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenais modestly ; "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppressions of the stronger."

"La Vallière does not say a word."

"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"

"Nay ; only I do not understand it," said Louise. "You talk like people not called upon to live in this world of ours."

"And very pretty your world is," said Montalais.

"A world," returned Athenais, "in which men worship a woman until she has fallen,—and insult her when she has fallen."

"Who spoke to you of falling?" said Louise.

"Yours is a new theory, then ; will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by feelings of affection?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful large eyes filled with tears, "if you did but know what a heart is, I would explain, and convince you ; a loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe ; a man never loves with idolatry, unless he feels sure he is loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious

of, and knows them ; if he has a fancy, or a strong desire, or an absorbing passion, for a coquette, he cannot mistake her ; a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice ; but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons thus united. It is the perfect abnegation of two who are desirous of blending their beings into one. If I ever love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure ; I will tell him, and he will understand, that my heart was torn by my refusal, and he, in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice,—he, in his turn, I say, will store his devotion for me,—will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, to insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, whilst uttering your blasphemies against love, such as I understand it. That is *my* idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my lover will despise me ; I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men, and my heart assures me that it is not such a man I would choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or will inspire him with virtues which he would never think he possessed.”

“ But, Louise,” exclaimed Montalais, “ you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice.”

“ What do you mean ?”

“ You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be—nay, more than he would be, even—of my coquetry, or of Athenais’s pride.”

“ All this is simply a different shade of coquetry, said Athenais ; “and Louise, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it.”

“ Oh !” said La Vallière.

“ Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual dis-

play of restrained outbreaks of affection, which end in smoke. It is very artful too, and very effective. I should even, now that I reflect on it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war on members of the other sex, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them ; but, at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the non-complex coquetry of Montalais." And the two young girls began to laugh.

La Vallière alone preserved silence, and quietly shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, "If you were to tell me, in the presence of a man, but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief where I am now."

"Very well ; die, poor tender little darling," replied Mademoiselle de Tonny-Charente ; "for, if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attainted and convicted of being a coquette from instinct ; in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette the world possesses."

"Oh ! mesdemoiselles," replied La Vallière, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing.

"Very well ! I will ask Bragelonne to tell me."

"Bragelonne ?" said Athenais.

"Yes ! Bragelonne, who is as courageous as Cæsar, and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet. Poor fellow ! for twelve years he has known you, loved you, and yet—one can hardly believe it—he has never even kissed the tips of your fingers."

"Tell us the reason of this cruelty, you who are all heart," said Athenais to La Vallière.

"Let me explain it by a single word—virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?"

"Come, Louise, tell us the truth," said Aure, taking her by the hand.

"What do you wish me to tell you?" cried Vallière.

"Whatever you like; but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you. A coquette from instinct; in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes."

"Oh! no, no; for pity's sake do not believe that!"

"What! twelve years of extreme severity."

"How can that be, since twelve years ago I was only five years old. The frivolity of the child cannot surely be placed to the young girl's account."

"Well! you are now seventeen; three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently coned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plantain trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen summers, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself."

"Yes, yes; but so it is!"

"Impossible!"

"But why impossible?"

"Tell us something credible and we will believe you."

"Yet, if you were to suppose one thing."

"What is that?"

"Suppose that I thought I was in love, and that I am not."

"What! not in love!"

"Well, then! if I have acted in a different manner to what others do when they are in love, it is because I do not love; and because my hour has not yet come."

"Louise, Louise," said Montalais, "take care, or I will remind you of the remark you made just now. Raoul is

not here ; do not overwhelm him while he is absent ; be charitable, and if, on closer inspection, you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow ! ” and she began to laugh.

“ Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now,” said Athenais ; “ would it be possible to detect an explanation of her indifference for the one in this compassion for the other.”

“ Say what you please,” said La Vallière, sadly ; “ upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me.”

“ Oh ! oh ! ” replied Montalais, “ temper, sorrow, tears ; we are jesting, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenais, as she is called ; she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true, but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan did not continue to love her. Look at me ; I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows precisely when he will be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future before us ! ”

“ Silly, silly girls ! ” murmured Louise.

“ You are quite right,” said Montalais ; “ and you alone have spoken words of wisdom.”

“ Certainly.”

“ I do not dispute it,” replied Athenais. “ And so it is clear you do not love poor M. de Bragelonne ? ”

“ Perhaps she does,” said Montalais ; “ she is not yet quite sure of it. But, in any case, listen, Athenais ; if M. de Bragelonne is ever free, I will give you a little friendly advice.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ To look at him well before you decide in favor of M. de Montespan.”

“ Oh ! in that way of considering the subject, M. de Bragelonne is not the only one whom one could look at with pleasure ; M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also.”

"He did not distinguish himself this evening," said Montalais; "and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him insupportable."

"M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening, will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Vallière?"

"Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him."

"What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan? Don't you know him?"

"No."

"Come, come, do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our vanity!—you have eyes, I suppose?"

"Excellent."

"Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening."

"Yes, nearly all."

"That is a very impertinent 'nearly all' for somebody."

"You must take it for what it is worth."

"Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you saw, which do you prefer?"

"Yes," said Montalais, "is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M.——"

"I prefer no one; I thought them all about the same."

"Do you mean, then, that among that brilliant assembly, the first court in the world, no one pleased you."

"I do not say that."

"Tell us, then, who your ideal is?"

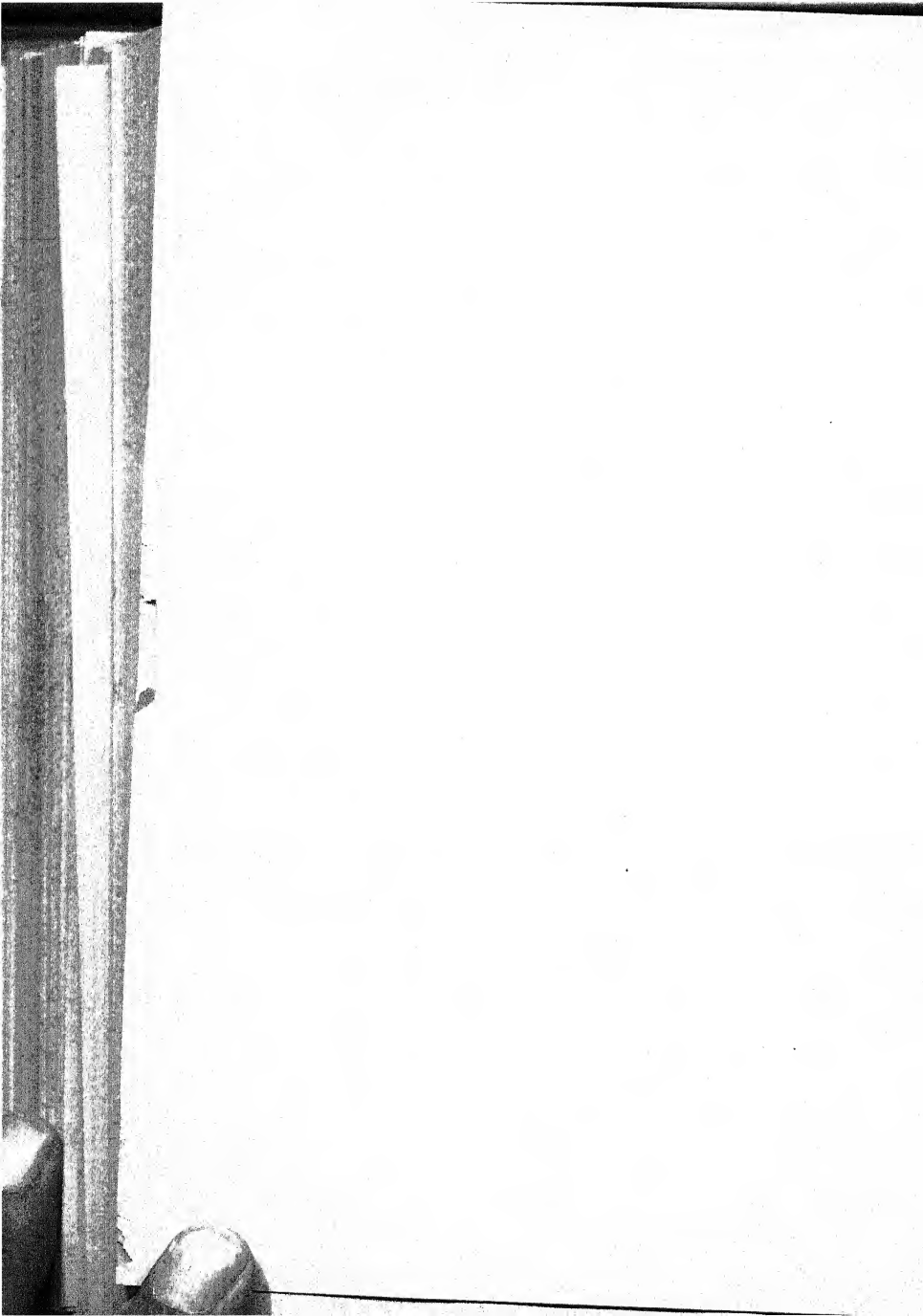
"It is not an ideal being."

"He exists, then?"

"In very truth," exclaimed La Vallière, aroused and excited; "I cannot understand you at all. What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche, of M. de Saint-Aignan, when the king



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was there." These words, uttered in a precipitate manner, and in an agitated, fervid tone of voice, made her two companions, between whom she was seated, exclaim in a manner that terrified her, "*The king!*"

La Vallière buried her face in her hands. "Yes," she murmured; "the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?"

'You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Louise, for you see a great distance; too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to hinge themselves."

"That is too true," cried La Vallière; "it is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so." At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Vallière's lips, a rustling of leaves, and of what sounded like some silken material, was heard behind the adjoining bushes. The young girls hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, without being able to see what it was that stirred them.

"It is a wolf or a wild boar," cried Montalais; "fly! fly!" The three girls, in the extremity of terror, fled by the first path that presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless, leaning against each other, feeling their hearts throb wildly, they endeavored to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the château, they decided to walk towards them. La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenais were obliged to support her.

"We have escaped well," said Montalais.

"I am greatly afraid," said La Vallière, "that it was something worse than a wolf. For my part, and I speak

as I think, I should have preferred to have run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to have been listened to and overheard. Fool, fool, that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said what I did." And saying this her head bowed like the water-tossed plume of a bulrush; she felt her limbs fail, and her strength abandoning her, and, gliding almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, sank down upon the turf.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KING'S UNEASINESS.

LET us leave poor La Vallière, who had fainted in the arms of her two companions, and return to the precincts of the royal oak. The young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man's figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside, he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty, burst out into a peal of laughter. It is almost superfluous to add that the form in question was that of a young and handsome cavalier, who immediately made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance.

"What, sire," said the second figure, advancing timidly, "has your majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight."

"It seems so," said the king, "and you can show yourself without fear."

"Take care, sire, you will be recognized."

"But I tell you they are flown."

"This is a most fortunate meeting, sire; and, if I dared offer an opinion to your majesty, we ought to follow them."

"They are far enough away by this time."

"They would quickly allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them."

"What do you mean by that, coxcomb that you are?"

"Why one of them seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun."

"The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun never shows himself in the night-time."

"Upon my word, sire, your majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hama-dryads, who have so good an opinion of us."

"I shall know them again very well, I assure you, with out running after them."

"By what means?"

"By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a remarkably sweet voice."

"Ah! your majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery."

"No one will ever say it is a means *you* make use of."

"Forgive my stupidity, sire."

"Come; let us go and look where I told you."

"Is the passion, then, which your majesty confided to me, already forgotten?"

"Oh! no, indeed. How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as Mademoiselle de la Vallière has?"

"Yet the other had as beautiful a voice."

"Which one?"

"The lady who has fallen in love with the sun."

"M. de Saint-Aignan!"

"Forgive me, sire."

"Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I

know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you?"

"What do you mean, sire?"

"That to-morrow every one will know that I have designs upon this little La Vallière; but be careful, Saint-Aignan, I have confided my secret to no one but you, and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret."

"You are angry, sire."

"No; but you understand I do not wish to compromise the poor girl."

"Do not be afraid, sire."

"You promise me, then?"

"I give you my word of honor."

"Excellent," thought the king, laughing to himself; "now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Vallière to-night."

Then, endeavoring to see where he was, he said, "Why, we have lost ourselves."

"Not quite so bad as that, sire."

"Where does that gate lead to?"

"To Rond-Point, sire."

"Where we were going when we heard the sound of women's voices?"

"Yes, sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honor of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your majesty's."

"You return to that subject too frequently, Saint-Aignan."

"Your majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me, without my knowledge, and without my having done any thing to deserve it. Your majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention, and compel regard."

"No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like," said the king, leaning familiarly upon Saint-Aignan's arm and taking the path he thought would lead them to the château; but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of one who will, perhaps, never attract my attention—in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me, and the truth is, that if I were not so taken with La Vallière——"

"Do not let that interfere with your majesty's intentions: you have time enough before you."

"What do you mean?"

"La Vallière is said to be very strict in her ideas."

"You excite my curiosity and I am anxious to see her again. Come let us walk on."

The king spoke untruly, for nothing, on the contrary, could make him less anxious, but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly. Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped, the courtier followed his example.

"Saint-Aignan," he said, "do you not hear some one moaning?"

"Yes, sire, and weeping, too, it seems."

"It is in this direction," said the king. "It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman."

"Run," said the king; and, following a by-path, they ran across the grass. As they approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

"Help, help," exclaimed two voices. The king and his companion redoubled their speed, and, as they approached nearer, the sighs they had heard were changed into loud sobs. The cry of "Help! help!" was again repeated; at the sound of which, the king and Saint-Aignan increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly, at the other side of a ditch, under the branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her

arms who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when, from the end of the path which led to the château, a dozen persons were approaching, who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries that had attracted the attention of the king and M. de Saint-Aignan.

"What is the matter, young ladies?" said Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment, letting La Vallière's head fall upon the ground.

"Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"

"Yes, sire, she has just fainted."

"Poor child!" said the king. "Quick, quick, fetch a surgeon." But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words may have seemed to others, he had not so carefully schooled himself, but that they appeared, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the sudden love with which she had inspired him.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de Vallière, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honor." And, in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the château, the king hurried forward, happy to

have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of speaking to her under a colorable pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing; the coachman was told to stop, and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled her to her senses. Having reached the château, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage, and, with the assistance of Athenais and of Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in one of the rooms of the ground-floor. After awhile, as the accident had not produced much effect upon those who had been walking, the promenade was resumed. During this time, the king had found Madame beneath a tree with overhanging branches, and had seated himself by her side.

"Take care, sire," said Henrietta to him, in a low tone, "you do not show yourself as indifferent as you ought to be."

"Alas!" replied the king, in the same tone, "I much fear we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep." He then added aloud, "You have heard of the accident, I suppose?"

"What accident?"

"Oh! in seeing you I forgot I hurried here expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it; one of your maids of honor, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, has just fainted."

"Indeed! poor girl," said the princess, quietly, "what was the cause of it?"

She then added, in an undertone, "You forget, sire, that you wish others to believe in your passion for this girl, and yet you remain here while she is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere."

"Ah! madame," said the king, sighing, "how much

more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how actively you think of everything."

He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, "Permit me to leave you, madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain, myself, that proper attention has been given to Mademoiselle de la Vallière." And the king left again to return to La Vallière, while those who had been present commented upon the king's remark;—"My uneasiness is very great."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING'S SECRET.

ON his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. "Well, Saint-Aignan," he inquired, with affected interest, "how is the invalid?"

"Really, sire," stammered Saint-Aignan, "to my shame, I confess I do not know."

"What! you do not know?" said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention for the object of his predilection.

"Will your majesty pardon me; but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters."

"Ah!" said the king, eagerly, "you have found, then——"

"The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and, having found mine, I was searching for yours, sire, when I had the happiness to meet your majesty."

"Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Vallière before

everything else," said the king, faithful to the character he had assumed.

"Oh! our charming invalid!" said Saint-Aignan; "how fortunately her fainting-fit came on, since your majesty had already occupied yourself about her."

"What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?"

"It ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your majesty is well aware that no secret can possibly exist for you."

"Well, what is her name?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Is she pretty?"

"Exceedingly, sire; and I recognized the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the sound of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away."

"But," inquired the king, anxiously, "what are the names of these two friends?"

"Sire," said Saint-Aignan, "will your majesty send me forthwith to the Bastille?"

"What for?"

"Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest, and at so fortunate a discovery, that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, knowing how much your attention was taken up by Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and then, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me precipitately, to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan."

"Your Majesty is ambitious, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. Well, I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one or other of those Three Graces we shall learn the names of the rest, and by the names their secrets."

"I, too," said the king, "only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Vallière is."

"Well," thought Saint-Aignan, "the king's regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too. It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it." And with this thought passing through his mind, he showed the king the room to which La Vallière had been carried; the king entered, followed by Saint-Aignan. In a low chamber, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Vallière, reclining in a large arm-chair, was inhaling deep draughts of the perfumed evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress, the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, that pass before the mental eyes of the sleeper, half-opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips without a sound escaping them. The pearl-like pallor of La Vallière possessed a charm it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she more resembled one whose soul had passed away, than a living being; she seemed not to hear either the whisperings of her companions, or the distant murmurs which arose from the court. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, delicate hands trembled from time to

time, as though at the contact of some invisible touch. She was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror he could not control, "she is dead."

"No, sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?"

But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his uneasiness on your account."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had darted through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about me?"

"Yes," said Montalais.

"The king is here, then?" said La Vallière, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, it is so," replied Saint-Aignan; "Your majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun."

"Hush!" said the king. And then approaching La Vallière, he said, "You are not well, Mademoiselle de la Vallière? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?"

"Sire," stammered out the poor child, pale and trembling, "I really do not know."

"You have been walking too far," said the king; "and fatigue, perhaps——"

"No, sire," said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, "it could not be from fatigue, for we passed most of the evening seated beneath the royal oak."

"Under the royal oak?" returned the king, starting.

"I was not deceived; it is as I thought." And he directed a look of intelligence at the comte.

"Yes," said Saint-Aignan, "under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"How do you know that?" inquired Montalais.

"In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so."

"In that case, she probably told you the cause of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's fainting?"

"Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber. I forget precisely which." La Vallière listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with an acuteness of perception, she foresaw a portion of the truth. Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequence of a terror only partially reassured. "Nay, fear nothing," he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; "the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs."

"It was a man, then!" said Louise; "it was a man who was listening?"

"Suppose it was so, mademoiselle, what great harm was there in his having listened? Is it likely that, even in your own opinion, you would have said anything which could not have been listened to?"

La Vallière wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. In Heaven's name," she said, "who was concealed there? who was listening?"

The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. "It was I," he said, bowing with marked respect. "Is it likely I could have frightened you?" La Vallière uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her; and moaning in utter despair, she again fell lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm; so that she was partially supported by him. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Montalais,

who stood a few paces from the king and La Vallière, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Vallière, did not even think of offering their assistance, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who, with one knee on the ground held La Vallière round the waist with his arm.

"You heard, sire!" murmured Athenaïs. But the king did not reply; he remained with his eyes fixed upon La Vallière's half-closed eyes, and held her quiescent hand in his own.

"Of course," replied Saint-Aignan, who, on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, too, would faint, advanced towards her, holding his arms extended,—“of course; we did not even lose a single word.” But the haughty Athenaïs was not a woman to faint easily; she darted a terrible look at Saint-Aignan, and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king's hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl. “Excellent,” whispered Saint-Aignan. “This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it.”

The king approached him, and, with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture, said, “Not a syllable, comte.”

The poor king forgot that, only an hour before, he had given him a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention; namely, that the comte should be indiscreet. It followed as a matter of course, that the latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former. Half an hour afterwards, everybody in Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conversation she had confessed her affection for the king. It was known, also, that the

king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which Mademoiselle de la Vallière's health had inspired him, had turned pale, and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting in his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers, that the greatest event of the period had just been revealed; that his majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that, consequently, Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by this sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philippe d'Orleans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking them in the following way:—To her daughter-in-law she said, "See, now, Thérèse, how very wrong you were to accuse the king; now it is said he is devoted to some other person; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?" To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said, "Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king is madly in love with that little La Vallière. Say nothing of it to your wife; for the queen will know all about it very soon." This latter confidential communication had an immediate result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife, and as it was not yet midnight and the *fête* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother's injunctions.

"Do not tell any one, the queen least of all," he said mysteriously, "what people say about the king."

"What do they say about him?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has suddenly fallen in love."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease.

"Ah!" she said, "and how long is it since this has been the case?"

"For some days, it seems. But that was nothing but nonsense; it is only this evening that he has revealed his passion."

"The king shows his good taste," said Madame; "in my opinion she is a very charming girl."

"I verily believe you are jesting."

"I! in what way?"

"In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Vallière herself."

"Really," continued the princess, "you speak as if you had read into the inmost recesses of La Vallière's heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king's affection?"

"And who has told you that she will not return it?"

"She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"You think so?"

"She is even affianced to him."

"She was so."

"What do you mean?"

"When they went to ask the king's permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission."

"Refused?"

"Yes, although the request was preferred by the Comte de la Fère himself, for whom the king has the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your royal brother's restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago."

"Well! the poor lovers must wait until the king is pleased to change his opinion; they are young, and there is time enough."

"But, dear me," said Philip, laughing, "I perceive you do not know the best part of the affair."

"No!"

"That by which the king was most deeply touched."

"The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?"

"To the very quick of his heart."

"But how?—in what manner?—tell me directly."

"By an adventure, the romance of which cannot be equaled."

"You know how I love to hear of such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting," said the princess, impatiently.

"Well, then——" and Monsieur paused.

"I am listening."

"Under the royal oak—you know where the royal oak is?"

"What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying."

"Well! Mademoiselle de la Vallière, fancying herself alone with her two friends, revealed to them her affection for the king."

"Ah!" said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, "her affection for the king?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"About an hour ago."

Madame started, and then said, "And no one knew of this affection?"

"No one."

"Not even his majesty?"

"Not even his majesty. The artful little puss kept her secret strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her."

"And from whom did you get this absurd tale?"

"Why, as everybody else did, from La Vallière, herself,

who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions."

Madame stopped suddenly, and by a hasty movement let go her husband's hand.

"Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?" Madame inquired.

"About that time."

"Is the king aware of it?"

"Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the perfect romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with Saint-Aignan, and heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it."

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, "But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it."

"Of course," said Monsieur; "he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it to you."

"What do you mean?" said Madame, growing angry.

"I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether."

"But why should they wish to conceal it from me?"

"From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her, nothing more."

Madame hung down her head: her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment's repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress, therefore, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her in some perturbation, but still gracious and attentive in his manner

Madame waited for him to speak about La Vallière first; but as he did not speak of her, she said, "And the poor girl?"

"What poor girl?" said the king.

"La Vallière. Did you not tell me, sire, that she had fainted?"

"She is still very ill," said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

"But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumor you were going to spread, sire?"

"What rumor?"

"That your attention was taken up by her."

"Oh!" said the king, carelessly, "I trust it will be reported all the same.

Madame still waited; she wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak. But the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about it; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she watched the king move away, than she set out in search of Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels that always follow in the wake of, and as tenders to the larger ships. Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her then state of mind. And as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found, to have an opportunity of recounting the event in all its details. And so he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had finished, Madame said to him, "Confess, now, that this is all a charming invention."

"Invention, no; a true story, yes."

"Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there."

"Upon my honor, Madame, I was there."

"And you think that these confessions may have made an impression upon the king?"

"Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente did upon me," replied Saint-Aignan; "do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough."

"The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries."

"Madame, the king is just as much Adonis as Apollo; and I saw that plain enough just now when La Vallière fell into his arms."

"La Vallière fell into the king's arms!"

"Oh! it was the most graceful picture possible; just imagine, La Vallière had fallen back fainting, and——"

"Well! what did you see?—tell me—speak!"

"I saw, what ten other people saw at the same time as myself; I saw that when La Vallière fell into his arms, the king almost fainted himself."

Madame uttered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger.

"Thank you," she said, laughing in a convulsive manner, "you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan." And she hurried away, alone, and almost suffocated by painful emotion, toward the château.

CHAPTER IX.

COURSES DE NUIT.

MONSIEUR quitted the princess in the best possible humor, and feeling greatly fatigued, retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose.

When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in paroxysms of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged curling his hair, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and, in token of his extreme satisfaction, distributed various presents among them. As, however, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the château entered the room, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharp-shooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind he said, "Have you remarked a very singular coincidence, monseigneur?"

"No; what is it?"

"The bad reception which his majesty, in appearance, gave the Comte de Guiche."

"In appearance?"

"Yes, certainly; since, in reality, he has restored him to favor."

"I did not notice it," said the prince.

"What, did you not remark, that, instead of ordering him to go away again into exile, as was natural, he encouraged him in his opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?"

"And you think the king was wrong, chevalier!" said the prince.

"Are not you of my opinion, prince?"

"Not altogether so, my dear chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have made a disturbance against a poor fellow whose want of judgment is more to be complained of than his intention."

"Really," said the chevalier, "as far as I am concerned,

I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me to the highest degree."

"Why so?" inquired Philip.

"Because I should have thought the king had been more jealous," replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favorite's remarks; this last word, however, ignited the powder.

"Jealous!" exclaimed the prince. "Jealous! what do you mean? Jealous of what, if you please—or jealous of whom?"

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed an excessively mischievous remark to escape him, as he was in the habit of doing. He endeavored, therefore, apparently to recall it while it was still possible to do so. "Jealous of his authority," he said, with an assumed frankness; "of what else would you have the king jealous?"

"Ah!" said the prince, "that's very proper."

"Did your royal highness," continued the chevalier, "solicit dear De Guiche's pardon?"

"No, indeed," said Monsieur. "De Guiche is an excellent fellow, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good."

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with regard to the king; but he thought he perceived that the time for indulgence, and even for the utmost indifference, had arrived, and that, in order to throw some light on the question, it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, beneath the husband's very nose.

"Very well, very well," said the chevalier to himself, "I must wait for De Wardes; he will do more in one day than I in a month; for I verily believe he is even more envious than I am. Then, again, it is not De Wardes I

require so much as that some event or another should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I learn that De Guiche has returned at the very moment Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king, that is clear; but she will not be so much longer if, as is asserted, the king has ceased to trouble his head about her. The moral of the whole matter is, to remain perfectly neutral, and await the arrival of some new caprice and let that decide the whole affair." And the chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the arm-chair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence, and, having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the consequence was that De Lorraine's wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was in high good-humor, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he passed into his sleeping apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that, as the night was cool, Monsieur, who was afraid of the toothache, would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening. The chevalier entered the princess's apartments at the very moment she came in herself. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission intrusted to him, and, in the first place, remarked the indifference and annoyance with which Madame received her husband's communication—a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner, he would have followed her; but she was returning to them; there was nothing to be done, therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron, appearing to ques-

tion earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens. He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm-in-arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and De Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the chevalier, instinctively, a feeling of repugnance. He did not, however, the less, on that account, salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was nearly deserted, that the illuminations began to burn out, and that the morning breeze was setting in, he turned to the left, and entered the château again, by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase, which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their dresses could be distinguished through the silence of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I certainly know those two," said he to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of the servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters which you would be glad to see, perhaps."

"Where from?" inquired the chevalier.

"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce can have to write to me from Calais?"

"I think I recognize the handwriting of Monsieur le Comte de Wardes."

"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown beings disappeared at the end of the court opposite to the one by which they had just entered. We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and, cautiously raising her hood, said, "Are we still far from the tree?"

"Yes, madame, more than five hundred paces; but pray rest awhile, you will not be able to walk much longer at this rate."

"You are right," said the princess, for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. "And now," she resumed, after having recovered her breath, "tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me."

"Oh, madame," cried the young girl, "you are already angry with me."

"No, my dear Athenais, reassure yourself, I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak; you are afraid of having offended the king, and I wish to tranquillize you by ascertaining myself if it were possible you could have been overheard."

"Oh yes, madame, the king was close to us."

"Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost."

"We thought we were quite alone, madame."

"There were three of you, you say?"

"Yes; La Vallière, Montalais, and myself."

"And *you*, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?"

"I am afraid so. Should such be the case, will your highness have the kindness to make my peace with his majesty?"

"If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you I will do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil. The night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under trees. It is not likely you were recognized by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself."

"Oh, madame, madame! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière were recognized, I must have been recognized also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan left no doubt on the subject."

"Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?"

"Not at all; it was one of the others who made some very flattering speeches about the king: and my remarks must have been much in contrast with hers."

"Montalais is such a giddy girl," said Madame.

"It was not Montalais. Montalais said nothing; it was La Vallière."

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly well already. "No, no," she said, "the king cannot have heard. Besides we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?" she continued.

"Alas! madame, yes."

"And you can find it again?"

"With my eyes shut."

"Very well; sit down on the bank where you were,

where La Vallière was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before; I will conceal myself in the thicket, and if I can hear you, I will tell you so."

"Yes, madame."

"If, therefore, you really spoke loud enough for the king to have heard you, in that case——"

Athenais seemed to await the conclusion of the sentence with some anxiety.

"In that case," said Madame, in a suffocated voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress; "in that case, I forbid you——" And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. "An idea occurs to me," she said.

"A good idea, no doubt, madame," replied Mademoiselle de Tonny-Charente.

"Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Vallière and yourself."

"Less so, for she is less compromised, having said less."

"That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth."

"Especially if she knows that your highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me."

"Very well, I think I have discovered what it is best for you all to pretend."

"How delightful."

"You had better say that all three of you were perfectly well aware that the king was behind the tree, or behind the thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too."

"Yes, madame."

"For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenais, Saint-Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks you made about him."

"Well, madame, you see very clearly that one can be

overheard," cried Athenais, "since M. de Saint-Aignan overheard us."

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. "Oh, you know Saint-Aignan's character very well," she said, "the favor the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random; not only so, he very often invents. That is not the question; the fact remains, Did or did not the king overhear?"

"Oh, yes, madame, he certainly did," said Athenais, in despair.

"In that case, do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew—mind, all three of you, for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all,—persist, I say, that you knew that the king and M. de Saint-Aignan were there, and that you wished to amuse yourselves at the expense of those who were listening."

"Oh, madame, at the *king's* expense; we shall never dare say that!"

"It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything explains itself. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M. de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Vallière might have said of——"

"And which she would have given anything to recall."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, an additional reason. Say the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance; *he* will be laughed at instead of you; and lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity unworthy of his rank. Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it."

"Oh, madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense!"

"It is to my own advantage."

"In what way?"

"How can you ask me why it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honor the remarks, annoyances, perhaps even calumnies, that might follow? Alas! you well know that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadilloes. But we have now been walking for some time, shall we be long before we reach it?"

"About fifty or sixty paces further; turn to the left, madame, if you please."

"And so you are sure of Montalais?" said Madame.

"Oh, certainly."

"Will she do what you ask her?"

"Everything. She will be delighted."

"And La Vallière——" ventured the princess.

"Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood."

"Yet, when it is her interest to do so——"

"I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas."

"Yes, yes," said Madame, "I have been already told that; she is one of those over-nice and affectedly-particular people who place heaven in the foreground in order to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuse to tell a falsehood,—as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest,—Mademoiselle Labaume le Blanc de la Vallière will think it but proper I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that, in Touraine yonder, or in le Blaisois—I know not where it may be, she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral life combined.

These words were uttered with a vehemence and harsh-

ness that terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was, that, as far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the precincts of the royal oak.

"Here we are," said Tonnay-Charente.

"We shall soon learn if one can overhear," replied Madame.

"Hush!" whispered the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of her companion's rank. Madame stopped.

"You see that you can hear," said Athenaïs.

"How?"

"Listen."

Madame held her breath; and, in fact, the following words, pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice; floated towards them.

"I tell you, vicomte, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you, I love her to distraction."

Madame started at the voice; and, beneath her hood, a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now held back her companion, and with a light step leading her some twenty paces away, that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said, "Remain here, my dear Athenaïs, and let no one surprise us. I think it must be you they are conversing about."

"Me, Madame?"

"Yes, you—or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Or, stay!—go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest." And then, as Athenaïs hesitated, she again said "Go!" in a voice which did not admit of reply. Athenaïs thereupon arranged her dress so as to prevent its rustling being heard; and, by a path beyond the group of trees, she re-

gained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the branches of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there, full of anxiety and apprehension. "Now," she said, "since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me."

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH MADAME ACQUIRES A PROOF THAT LISTENERS HEAR
WHAT IS SAID.

THERE was a moment's silence, as if the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time as Madame, to the youthful passionate disclosures of De Guiche.

Raoul was about to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the large oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune."

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed."

"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you, not merely loving, but not knowing how to conceal your love."

"What do you mean?" said De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have,—in other words,—to a man who would rather die than betray you; you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but to the first person that approaches you."

"Are you mad, Bragelonne," exclaimed De Guiche, "to say such a thing to me?"

"The fact stands thus, however."

"Impossible! How, in what manner can I have ever been indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, that your eyes, your looks, your sighs, proclaim, in spite of yourself, that exaggerated feeling which leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, that makes him confide his grief to the trees, or to the air, from the very moment he has no longer any living being within reach of his voice. Besides, remember this; it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially the very things which ought *not* to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here, you have a thousand times, and in a thousand different ways, confessed your love for her; and yet, had you not said one word your return would alone have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion; that if you do not place a better watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or other something will happen that will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me? Who will save her? for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."

"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, what reply have you to make?"

"This, that when that day arrives I shall be no more a living being than I feel myself now."

"I do not understand you."

"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; my remaining strength is exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone and unaccompanied for a skirmish, it sometimes happens that he may meet with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone, he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly, his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others should still be met with, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he should still happen to retain one, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case; first, I had to struggle against myself; afterwards, against Buckingham; now since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even against the nature of that woman. Still I do not deceive myself; having devoted myself to the service of such a love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not the lady you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."

"Why so?"

"You know the princess's character,—somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or a child, and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her,—love her, if you will,—for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her. Yet, while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then herself, and lastly, your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"What for?"

"Because, seeing how much I suffer through this woman,

you endeavor to console me, because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."

"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, comte; what I think I do not always say, but in that case I say nothing; but when I speak, I know not either how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation, Madame, her head stretched forward with eager ear and dilated glance, endeavoring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed Guiche. "She is not merely giddy, but frivolous; she is not only attracted by novelty, she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith, she is not simply susceptible to flattery, she is a practiced and cruel coquette. A thorough coquette! yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the torments of hell; brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage. But, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

"A victory," he asked, "and of what kind?"

"Of what kind, you ask?"

"Yes."

"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young—madly in love, I possessed, however sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks, I rose, and then, without having done anything more towards you than love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible—you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness, dashed me down again from sheer caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood

though you may be, of the love of a man of honor; I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die despising you.’”

“Oh!” cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound truth which De Guiche’s words betrayed, “I was right in saying you were mad, Guiche.”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; “since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian, or Croat, or Turk, will perhaps kindly put me out of my misery.” De Guiche did not finish, or rather as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment caused Raoul to leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The branches of the trees were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches, which would have struck her face, and, with the other, she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and, more than all, by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognized Madame, and, uttering a loud cry, he removed his hands from his temples, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, merely muttered a few words of respect.

“Monsieur de Bragelonne,” said the princess, “have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, M. de Guiche, remain here: I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm.”

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just

said, he was brave ; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and, observing Bragelonne's hesitation, he turned towards him a glance full of resignation and grateful acknowledgment. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the vicomte, and holding out the arm which the princess had just desired him to give her, he pressed his friend's hand in his own with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart. Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was at an end. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air, and, when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, in that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering in their beauty. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard, and had allowed so many things to be heard, during the evening, and, leading him to a neighboring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, "I have brought you here, because yonder where you were, everything can be overheard."

"Everything can be overheard, did you say, madame?" replied the young man, mechanically.

"Yes."

"Which means——" murmured De Guiche.

"Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said."

"Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me," stammered De Guiche; and he bent down his head, like

an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

"And so," she said, "you judge me as you have said?" De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent. He felt almost on the point of fainting.

"I do not complain," continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness; "I prefer a frankness that wounds me, to flattery, which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette and a worthless creature."

"Worthless," cried the young man; "you worthless! Oh, no; most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless. No, no; I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman."

"What can it matter to you what I said?" returned the comte. "What am I compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?"

"Monsieur de Guiche, both you and I are human beings, and, knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life; with you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank, for I am always so, but truthful. I implore you, therefore, to love me no more, and to forget utterly that I have ever addressed a word or a glance towards you."

De Guiche turned around, bending a look full of passionate devotion upon her. "You," he said; "*you* excuse yourself; *you* implore me?"

"Certainly; since I have done evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, comte, this is what we will agree to. You will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry. Nay, do not interrupt me. I will forgive you for having

said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse, perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex, a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear." Madame pronounced this last word in such an accent of frankness, and even of tenderness, that poor De Guiche's heart felt almost bursting.

"Oh! madame, madame!" he stammered out.

"Nay, listen further," she continued. "When you shall have renounced all thought of me forever, from necessity in the first place, and, next, because you will yield to my entreaty, then you will judge me more favorably, and I am convinced you will replace this love—forgive the frivolity of the expression—by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which, I promise you, shall be cordially accepted."

De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. "Madame," he said, "what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions."

"What!" said Madame, "do you refuse my friendship, then?"

"No, no! I do not need your friendship, madame. I prefer to die from love, than to live for friendship."

"Comte!"

"Oh! madame," cried De Guiche, "the present is a moment for me, in which no other consideration and no other respect exist, than the consideration and respect of a man of honor towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me, you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but their bitterness has been owing to my passion for you; I have said I wish to die, and die I will. If I lived, you would

forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure."

Henrietta, who was standing buried in thought, and nearly as agitated as De Guiche himself, turned aside her head as but a minute before he had turned aside his. Then, after a moment's pause, she said, "And you love me, then, very much?"

"Madly; madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you, or whether you listen to me still."

"It is a hopeless case," she said, in a playful manner; "a case which must be treated with soothing applications. Give me your hand. It is as cold as ice." De Guiche knelt down, and pressed to his lips, not one, but both of Madame's hands.

"Love me, then," said the princess, "since it cannot be otherwise." And almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen, and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot, and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fiber of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. "Give me your arm, comte," she said, "and let us return."

"Ah! madame," said the comte, trembling and bewildered; you have discovered a third way of killing me."

"But, happily, it is the slowest, is it not?" she replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees they had so lately quitted.

CHAPTER XI.

ARAMIS'S CORRESPONDENCE.

WHILST De Guiche's affairs, which had been suddenly set to right without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed the unexpected

aspect we have seen, Raoul, in obedience to the request of the princess, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation, the results of which he was far from guessing; and he soon after joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower gardens. During this time, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes' letter with surprise, for it informed him of the sword-thrust received at Calais, and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to inform De Guiche and Monsieur, whatever there might be in the affair likely to be most disagreeable to both of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders at the last paragraph, and, in fact, De Wardes was out of date, as we have seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulders upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone, "It is really incredible; and yet poor De Wardes is not deficient in ability; but the truth is, it is not very apparent, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and yet he writes such silly stuff as that. If it had not been for that miserable letter, which has no meaning at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps been as good as a sword thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for many days to come."

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished; well, the scent is lost, and unless some extraordinary chance——" And thus saying, as if to appeal to

his good star, the chevalier, greatly out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius was at his orders, he perceived returning towards the château, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had struck his attention half an hour previously.

"Admirable!" he thought, striking his hands together, "this is my providential mysterious affair." And he started out precipitately, along the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle, and her companion. But as he arrived at the door of the little court, he nearly knocked against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her, not five minutes before, with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not be far off. Consequently, he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then when she had advanced a few steps, with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily round on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time; the gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was hurrying towards one of the wings of the château, behind which he was on the point of disappearing. There was not an instant to lose; the chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he approached.

It was evident, however, that as the man pursued was walking quietly, in a pensive manner, with his head bent down, either beneath the weight of grief or happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless, indeed, he were to enter by some door or another, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this, certainly, would have happened, if, at the very moment he turned the angle, the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves wheeling in the opposite direction. The chevalier was ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when looking up he recognized the superintendent. Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was the bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged out of politeness to make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a few paces: and as Monsieur Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, the chevalier did what the king himself would have done, namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then, almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, De Lorraine saw, with the most unfeigned displeasure, the figure of his unknown becoming dimmer in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and, once resigned, gave his entire attention to Fouquet:—"You arrive late, monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished

that, having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so; but I came as soon as I was free."

"Is Paris quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well."

"Ah! I understand you wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our *fêtes*."

"I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you, therefore, to inform me if the king is in the château or not, if I am likely to be able to see him this evening, or if I shall have to wait until to-morrow."

"We have lost sight of his majesty during the last half hour nearly," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments?" inquired Fouquet.

"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I just now met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you a moment ago encountered was the king himself——" and the chevalier paused, hoping that, in this manner, he might learn who it was he had been hurrying after. But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, "No, monsieur, it was not the king."

The chevalier, disappointed in his expectation, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the center of a group, he said to the superintendent: "Stay, monsieur; there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."

"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented him from seeing through the darkness.

"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder

to those men with torches in their hands, is M. Colbert?"

"M. Colbert himself. He is giving his orders personally to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations."

"Thank you," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head, which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having, on the contrary, learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and sadness. "What!" he said to him, "the fellow's name alone seemed to affect you. Is it possible, that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that man is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, have you faith in your good star?"

"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied, in a trembling voice. "You, my dear D'Herblay, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes! I repeat it once more, I am too full of happiness! so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have . . . I have risen so high . . . You know my motto: '*Quia non ascendam?*' I have risen so high that nothing is left me but to descend from my elevation. I cannot believe in the progress of a success already more than human."

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon him. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably fear for your disgrace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend; I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even

that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances that befall you, in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."

"Bah! in confession."

"Oh! I should blush too much if you were my confessor." And Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without further betrayal of his thoughts than a placid smile.

"Well," he said, "discretion is a great virtue."

"Silence," said Fouquet; "yonder venomous reptile has recognized us, and is crawling this way."

"Colbert?"

"Yes; leave me, D'Herblay; I do not wish that fellow to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to *you*."

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, "What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?"

"Yes, but I may not be always here," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"On that day, then, if that day should ever dawn," said Aramis, tranquilly, "we will think over a means of dispensing with the friendship, or of braving the dislike of M. Colbert. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this reptile, as you did him the honor of styling him, a conversation the need for which I do not perceive, why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?"

"To Madame," said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his *souvenirs*.

"Yes, certainly, to Madame."

"You remember," continued Aramis, "that we have

been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his majesty's friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and, for our sakes, treat this ally with consideration."

"But," said Fouquet, "are you quite sure that it is upon her the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?"

"If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police."

"Very well! I will go there at once, and, at all events, I shall have a means of introduction in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set with diamonds."

"I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal."

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. "For you, monseigneur," said the courier aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

"For your grace," said the lackey in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch in his hand, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop of Vannes, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight. Those who love, or who are beloved, will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which, however, contained only these words: "It is but an hour since I quitted you, it is an age since I told you how much I love you." And that was all. Madame de Bellière had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and, apprehensive lest his remembrance of her might be effaced for too long a period from

the heart she regretted, she dispatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold. As for Aramis, he, on his side, was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and reflection, the following letter:

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy; a woman loves him. He learned it accidentally, as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions; and his majesty has entirely abandoned himself to his new caprice. The girl's name is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and she is sufficiently pretty to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the letter and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still delightedly inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

"Monseigneur," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked.

"An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl of the name of La Vallière?"

"Not at all."

"Reflect a little."

"Ah! yes, I believe so; one of Madame's maids of honor."

"That must be the one."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, monseigneur, it is to that young girl that you must pay your visit this evening."

"Bah! why so?"

"Nay, more than that, it is to her you must present your cameos."

"Nonsense."

"You know, monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly."

"But this is unforeseen——"

"That is my affair. Pay your court in due form, and without loss of time, to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Bellière that your devotion is altogether politic."

"What do you mean, my dear D'Herblay, and whose name have you just pronounced?"

"A name which ought to convince you that, as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be just as well informed about others. Pay your court therefore to La Vallière."

"I will pay my court to whomsoever you like," replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

"Come, come, descend again to the earth, traveler in the seventh heaven," said Aramis; "M. de Colbert is approaching. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see, how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful." In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom complimented him upon the arrangements of the *fête*: all of which so puffed him up that he could hardly contain himself.

"If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wanted to make itself as big as the Ox.'"

Colbert arrived in the center of the circle blazing with light; Fouquet awaited his approach, unmoved and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility.

"Oh! oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone to the superinten-

dent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for a few more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps." Colbert was the first to salute them, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

"Well, monseigneur, what do your eyes say? Have we shown our good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh!" said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence. We are poor, we servants of the king, and Fontainebleau is no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."

"Quite true," replied Fouquet coolly.

"But what can we do, monseigneur?" continued Colbert, "we have done our best on slender resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, monseigneur, if you were to offer to his majesty a *fête* in your wonderful gardens—in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions of francs."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

"An additional reason," returned Colbert; "it would, indeed, be truly magnificent."

"But do you suppose, monsieur, that his majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"

"I have no doubt whatever of it," cried Colbert, hastily; "I will guarantee that he does."

"You are exceedingly kind," said Fouquet. "I may depend on it then?"

"Yes, monseigneur; yes, certainly."

"Then I will consider the matter," yawned Fouquet.

"Accept, accept," whispered Aramis, eagerly.

"You will consider?" repeated Colbert.

"Yes," replied Fouquet; "in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king."

"This very evening, monseigneur, this very evening."

"Agreed," said the superintendent. "Gentlemen, I should wish to issue my invitations; but you know that, wherever the king goes, the king is in his own palace; it is by his majesty, therefore, that you must be invited." A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

"Proud and dauntless man," thought Colbert, "you accept and yet you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," whispered Fouquet, in a low tone to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter, whilst Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king was still visible.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ORDERLY CLERK.

THE king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, and feeling that he had become, during the last two hours, the confidant of the king, began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner; and, from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather, where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of Guiche for Madame, that of La Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais,

that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for himself, was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, Saint-Aignan was the model of courtiers, past, present and to come; and, moreover, showed himself such an excellent narrator, and so discerningly appreciative that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. While the king no longer experienced for Madame any remains of the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this same eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, great gratification for his vanity, from which he could not free himself. He experienced this pleasure then, but nothing more, and his heart was not, for a single moment, alarmed at what Madame might, or might not, think of his adventure. When, however, Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest asked, "Now, Saint Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is, do you not?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she is everything that woman can wish to be—that is to say, beloved by your majesty; I mean, that she will be everything your majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow; as you have remarked, that is my affair. But tell me what others say of her."

"They say she is well-conducted."

"Oh!" said the king, smiling, "that is mere report."

"But rare enough, at court, sire, to believe when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right. Is she well-born?"

"Excellently ; the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."

"Ah ! yes, my aunt's major-domo ; I remember ; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her the attention she deserved."

"Oh ! sire, I trust that your majesty will now repair time lost."

"And the report—you tell me—is, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière never had a lover."

"In any case, I do not think your majesty would be much alarmed at the rivalry."

"Yet, stay," said the king, in a very serious tone of voice.

"Your majesty ?"

"I remember."

"Ah !"

"If she has no lover, she has, at least, a betrothed."

"A betrothed !"

"What ! Count, do you not know that ?"

"No."

"You, the man who knows all the news ?"

"Your majesty will excuse me. You know this betrothed, then ?"

"Assuredly ! his father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract : it is——" The king was about to pronounce the vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped, and knitted his brows.

"It is——" repeated Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance he had some trouble to disguise.

"Can I put your majesty in the way ?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

"No : for I no longer remember to whom I intended to

refer; indeed, I only remember very indistinctly, that one of the maids of honor, was to marry—the name, however, has escaped me.”

“Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“Very likely,” said the king.

“In that case, the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten suitors away.”

“At all events,” said the king, “I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me every information about her.”

“Yes, sire, and when shall I have the honor of seeing your majesty again, to give you the latest news?”

“Whenever you have procured it.”

“I shall obtain it speedily, then, if the information can be as quickly obtained as my wish to see your majesty again.”

“Well said, count! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?”

“None, sire.”

“Madame did not get angry, then?”

“I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually.”

“That’s well; but I think I hear voices in the ante-rooms—no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan.” The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, “Sire, it is M. Fouquet who has this moment arrived, by your majesty’s orders, he says. He presented himself, but, because of the lateness of the hour, he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced.”

"M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o'clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau the following day, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at two o'clock in the morning! This is, indeed, zeal!" exclaimed the king, delighted to see himself so promptly obeyed. "On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow."

The king placed his finger on his lips; and Saint-Aignan, his heart brimful of happiness, hastily withdrew, telling the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who, thereupon, entered the king's apartment. Louis rose to receive him.

"Good-evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously; "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"

"At nine in the evening, sire."

"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your rooms at Saint-Mandé during the last three or four days."

"It is perfectly true, your majesty, that I have kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I had a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with a most gracious air.

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will you permit me to remind you of the promise made to grant an audience?"

"Ah! yes; some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, sire. The hour is, perhaps, badly chosen; but the time of the companion whom I have brought with

me is valuable, and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese——”

“Who is it, then?”

“The bishop of Vannes, whose appointment your majesty, at my recommendation, deigned, three months since, to sign.”

“That is very possible,” said the king, who had signed without reading; “and is he here?”

“Yes, sire; Vannes is an important diocese; the flock belonging to this pastor need his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish, at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d’Herblay is unequalled in such kind of missions.”

“M. d’Herblay!” said the king, musingly, as if his name, heard long since, was not, however, unknown to him.

“Oh!” said Fouquet, promptly, “your majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and valuable servants?”

“No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?”

“He has this very day received letters which will, perhaps, compel him to leave, so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your majesty.”

“Is he waiting?”

“He is here, sire.”

“Let him enter.”

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

“Vannes!” he said: “you are bishop of Vannes, I believe?”

"Yes, sire."

"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?" Aramis bowed.

"Near the coast?" Aramis again bowed.

"A few leagues from Belle-Isle, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us poor Bretons, sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance, if it be six leagues on land; and an immense distance, if it be leagues on the sea. Besides, I have the honor to mention to your majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.

"Yes, it is said so," replied Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

"What do you mean by 'it is said so?'" exclaimed the king.

"He has, sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me."

"What may that be, sire?"

"That you should have at the head of the diocese a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle?"

"Oh, sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."

"In what way, sire?"

"I will change your bishopric."

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

"What income does Vannes bring you in?" continued the king.

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"Sixty thousand livres, sire," said Aramis.

"So trifling an amount as that; but you possess other property, Monsieur de Vannes?"

"I have nothing else, sire; only M. Fouquet pays me one thousand two hundred livres a year for his pew in the church."

"Well, M. d'Herblay, I promise you something better than that."

"Sire——"

"I will not forget you."

Aramis bowed, and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was accustomed to do towards women and members of the Church. Aramis gathered that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

"His is, indeed, a remarkable face," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he."

"His learning is not extensive, then?"

"He changed the sword for the crucifix, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again on another occasion——"

"I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."

"Of me, sire?"

"Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments."

"I cannot express to your majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me."

"I understand you, M. Fouquet. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you."

"In that case, I was indeed unhappy, sire."

"But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive——"

"I did, indeed, sire; but I awaited with resignation the day when the truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived."

"Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?"

"Alas! sire, I perceived it."

"And do you know the reason?"

"Perfectly well; your majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure."

"Not so; far from that."

"Or, rather an indifferent administrator. In a word, you thought that, as the people had no money, there would be none for your majesty either."

"Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived."

Fouquet bowed.

"And no disturbances, no complaints?"

"And money enough," said Fouquet.

"The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month."

"I have more, not only for all your majesty's requirements, but for all your caprices."

"I thank you, Monsieur Fouquet," replied the king, seriously. "I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything."

"I will avail myself of the interval to amass five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war."

"Five or six millions!"

"For the expenses of your majesty's household only, be it understood."

"You think war probable, M. Fouquet?"

"I think that if heaven has bestowed on the eagle a

beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character."

The king blushed with pleasure.

"We have spent a great deal of money these few days past, Monsieur Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?"

"Sire, your majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million francs to lavish in those twenty years."

"That is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet," said the king.

"I will economize, sire. Besides, your majesty has two valuable servants in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your treasures—and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your majesty; and the other will economize money for you, and this will be M. Colbert's province."

"M. Colbert?" returned the king, astonished.

"Certainly, sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant."

At this commendation, bestowed by the traduced on the traducer, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look, anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address, he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"

"Yes, sire, I praise him; for, besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be devoted to your majesty's interests."

"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.

"Exactly, sire."

"Explain yourself."

"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to

make the money come in ; he the man who is needed to prevent it leaving."

"Nay, nay, monsieur le surintendant, you will presently say something which will correct this good opinion?"

"Do you mean as far as administrative abilities are concerned, sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the slightest."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor, sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification attached to it in the present day ; but, as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had addressed as the superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, that at this juncture served admirably to restore Fouquet to his place, and Colbert to his own.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was Colbert, however, that notwithstanding his economy, had the arrangement of my *fêtes* here at Fontainebleau ; and I assure you, Monsieur Fouquet, that in no way has he checked the expenditure of money." Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

"Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves, in this respect, all the praise your majesty may bestow upon him."

The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." The king possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves, and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had, in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his ar-

rangements; in other words, that the magnificent *fêtes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or another might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by a person coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, only to find that the fashionably-dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation, yet with extreme tact, inspired the king with the highest esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister. Fouquet took his leave at a quarter to three in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had received; and a good hour was employed by him in going over again in memory the embroidery, the tapestries, the bills of fare of the various banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all the offspring of the "Clerk Colbert's" invention. The result was, the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last eight days, and decided that faults could be found in his *fêtes*. But Fouquet, by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity, had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred, had ever yet succeeded in hurting Fouquet.

CHAPTER XIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

As we have seen, Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment the superintendent entered it. Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission that required dispatch, and he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to the best advantage. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage; he was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception threw all other favorites into the shade, and counterbalanced, by his close attention, the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favorite, but the toady of the king. M. de Saint-Aignan began to think what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him, but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the château. Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him, and after having turned, and twisted, and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motionless as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although its curtains were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, Saint-Aignan concluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away

such a weight of happiness, that all his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Vallière's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what title or conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Vallière. But, as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as the case might be, if he questioned De Guiche with that extreme tact, and, at the same time, with that persistence in attaining an object of which he was capable. Saint-Aignan's plan was as follows:—If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king, with alacrity, that he had lighted upon a pearl, and claim the privilege of setting the pearl in question in the royal crown. If the information were unsatisfactory—which, after all, might be possible,—he would examine how far the king cared about La Vallière, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all the ladies of the court who might have the least pretensions to the king's heart, beginning with Madame and finishing with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Vallière know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner he would be able to air his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her, in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension, to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in trying to make his fortune, while she was making her own. As far as concerned the

day when the bombshell of the past should burst, if ever there were any occasion, Saint-Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while, with regard to La Vallière, he would still have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity. It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn in half an hour, that Saint-Aignan, the son of earth, as La Fontaine would have said, determined to get De Guiche into conversation: in other words, to trouble him in his happiness—a happiness of which Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Saint-Aignan perceived De Guiche, standing, motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his eyes fastened upon the lighted window,—the sleepest hour of night-time, which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies, the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts throb, and heads feel dull and languid—an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, while addressing a loving greeting to the dawning light. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had one stood before him, to secure him uninterrupted indulgence in his dreams. It was precisely at this hour that Saint-Aignan, badly advised,—selfishness always counsels badly,—came and struck him on the shoulder, at the very moment he was murmuring a word or rather a name.

“Ah!” he cried loudly, “I was looking for you.”

“For me?” said De Guiche, starting.

“Yes; and I find you seemingly moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear comte, you have been attacked by a poetical malady, and are making verses?”

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a

thousand conflicting sensations were muttering defiance of Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said. "But by what happy chance——"

"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes: and I find you now in the very act."

"Of doing what, I should like to know?"

"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."

"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing.

"Yes, my dear comte, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."

"And you have acquired the right to do so."

"I?"

"You; no doubt of it. You; the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"

"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay a moment; I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear comte; tell me all about it." And De Guiche, afraid that Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe the window, where the light was still burning, took the comte's arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods, it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight." And while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he remained in the flower-garden adjoining the château.

"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."

"It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are." And then, after a moment's silence, Saint-Aignan continued, "I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in whom you have interested yourself."

"And with whom you are in love?"

"I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance."

"You are right," said De Guiche with a sigh; "a man's heart is a very precious gift."

"Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you."

"Oh! you are well known, comte. Well?"

"It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think."

"Why so?"

"I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Bah!"

"Never."

"Did you not obtain admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame's household?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente—and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear comte—is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and her admittance very easy."

"You are jesting."

"No; and upon my honor I do not know what you mean."

"And you had nothing, then, to do with her admission?"

"No."

"You do not know her?"

"I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never taken any interest in her, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require." And De Guiche made a movement as though he were about to leave his questioner.

"Nay, nay, one moment, my dear comte," said Saint-Aignan; "you shall not escape me in this manner."

"Why, really, it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments."

"And yet you were not going in when I—did not meet, but, found you."

"Therefore, my dear comte," said De Guiche, "as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service."

"And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Will you swear that you have no injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?"

"Oh! I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal."

"You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess's household with the ladies of honor. Nay, a song even has been written about it."

"Oh! songs are written about everything."

"Do you know it?"

"No: sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance."

"I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends."

"Very well, at all events that is something."

"When Maids of Honor happen to run short,
Lo!—Guiche will furnish the entire Court."

"The idea is weak, and the rhyme poor," said De Guiche.

"What can you expect, my dear fellow? it is not Racine's or Molière's, but La Feuillade's; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet."

"It is very unfortunate, though, that you only remember the termination."

"Stay, stay, I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet.

Why, there's the birdcage, with a pretty pair,
The charming Montalais, and. . .

"And La Vallière," exclaimed Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant besides of Saint-Aignan's object.

"Yes, yes, you have it. You have hit upon the word, 'La Vallière.'"

"A grand discovery indeed."

"Montalais and La Vallière, these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interest yourself," said Saint-Aignan laughing.

"And so, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's name is not to be met with in the song?"

"No, indeed."

"And you are satisfied, then?"

"Perfectly; but I find Montalais there," said Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

"Oh! you will find her everywhere. She is a singularly active young lady."

"You know her?"

"Indirectly. She was the *protégée* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protégée* of Manicamp's; Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame's household, and a situation for Malicorne,

as an officer in Monsieur's household. Well, I asked for the appointments, for you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp."

"And you obtained what you sought?"

"For Montalais, yes: for Malicorne, yes and no; for as yet he is only on trial. Do you wish to know anything else?"

"The last word of the couplet still remains, La Vallière," said Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile that so tormented Guiche.

"Well," said the latter, "it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame's household."

"Ah!" said Saint-Aignan.

"But," continued Guiche, assuming a great coldness of manner, "you will oblige me, comte, not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle Labaume le Blanc de la Vallière is a young lady perfectly well-conducted."

"Perfectly well-conducted, do you say?"

"Yes."

"Then you have not heard the last rumor?" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"No, and you will do me a service, my dear comte, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it."

"Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously."

"Yes; Mademoiselle de Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends."

Saint-Aignan started. "Aha!" he said.

"Yes, comte," continued Guiche: "and consequently, you, the most distinguished man in France for polished courtesies of manner, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position."

Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation, and partially from disappointed curiosity. Guiche made him a very profound bow.

"You send me away," said Saint-Aignan, who was dying to know the name of the friend.

"I do not send you away, my dear fellow. I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis."

"And those lines——"

"Are a *quatrain*. You understand, I trust, that a *quatrain* is a serious affair?"

"Of course."

"And as, of these four lines, of which it is composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention."

"I quite understand. Adieu! comte. By the by——"

"What?"

"Are you quick at making verses?"

"Wonderfully so."

"Will you have quite finished the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?"

"I *hope* so."

"Adieu, then, until to-morrow."

"Adieu, adieu!"

Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led Guiche and Saint-Aignan a good distance from the château.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his own subjects of interest. Saint-Aignan on leaving Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove,—at the very spot where the outbuildings for the servants begin, and where, behind the thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard was erected. Saint-Aignan, alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the opposite direction. The one proceeded to the flower-garden, while the other

bent his steps toward the walls. Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and thick moss. He was deliberating a means of taking his revenge which seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was vexed with himself for not having learned more about La Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious measures he had resorted to in order to acquire more information about her, when suddenly the murmur of a human voice attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman's voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stifled exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman's voice prevailed. Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived with the greatest surprise that the voices proceeded, not from the ground but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LABYRINTH.

SAINT-AIGNAN, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly what about, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour and in such a singular position, Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and

approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. And taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak.

"Really, Monsieur Manicamp," she said, in a voice which, notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him, preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really your indiscretion is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."

"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh! if any one were to see me, I declare I should die of very shame."

"Oh! that would be very silly; I do not believe you would."

"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to injure myself gratuitously, is really very foolish of me; so, adieu, Monsieur Manicamp."

"So far so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder, on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with blue satin shoes.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, donot go away; I have a great many things to say to you, of the greatest importance still."

"Montalais," said Saint-Aignan to himself, "one of the three. Each of the three gossips had her adventure, only I imagined the hero of this one's adventure was Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At her companion's appeal, Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent, and Saint-Aignan could observe

the unfortunate Manicamp climb from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his inconvenient position.

"Now, listen to me," said he; "you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent."

"Of course. But why did you write me a letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?"

"I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your becoming attached to Madame's household; because most anxiously desirous of obtaining the interview you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it, at such an hour and in such a locality, was, that the hour seemed to me to be the most prudent and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"But everything I wish to say is perfectly honorable, I assure you."

"I think, Monsieur Manicamp, it will be more becoming in me to take my leave."

"No, no!—listen to me, or I will jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance; for a branch of this chestnut tree causes me a good deal of annoyance, and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me."

"I am listening, and I agree to do so; but be as brief as possible, for if you have a branch of the chestnut-tree which annoys you, I wish you to understand that one of

the rounds of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through."

"Do me the kindness to give me your hand."

"Why?"

"Will you have the goodness to do so?"

"There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?"

"To draw you towards me."

"What for? You surely do not wish me to join you in the tree?"

"No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall; there, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you."

"No, no; you are very well where you are; we should be seen."

"Do you really think so?" said Manicamp, in an insinuating voice?

"I am sure of it."

"Very well, I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed."

"Monsieur Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject."

"You are right, we are so."

"You wrote me a letter?"

"I did."

"Why did you write?"

"Fancy, at two o'clock to-day, De Guiche left."

"What then?"

"Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do."

"Of course, I see that, since you are here now."

"Don't be in a hurry. You are aware, I suppose, that De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?"

"Alas! yes."

"It was the very height of imprudence on his part,

then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated."

"Monsieur Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras."

"Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh! the deuce!"

"What's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Montalais, but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honor of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress."

"It is quite dark," replied Montalais, laughing; "so, pray continue, M. Manicamp."

"De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, at a slower pace. You quite understand that to throw one's self into the water, for instance, with a friend, at the same headlong rate as he himself would do it, would be the act either of a fool or a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or, if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer; and that I should see him returning much faster than he went, without having, myself, gone farther than Ris or Melun—and that even was a good distance you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

"Laugh as much as you like; but if, instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall as you are, you were sitting on this branch as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend."

"Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp; a few minutes will

soon pass away; you were saying, I think, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun."

"Yes, I went through Ris and Melun, and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at Fontainebleau; I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere, but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him; he arrived riding at full gallop, he entered the château; and there he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o'clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying with uneasiness. You understand that I have not been running my head into the lion's den, in entering the château, as my imprudent friend has done; I came at once to the servants' offices, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, for Heaven's sake, my dear young lady, relieve me from my anxiety."

"There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received."

"Bah!"

"The king made quite a fuss over him."

"The king, who exiled him!"

"Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever."

"Ah! ah!" said Manicamp, "that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?"

"Not a word."

"That is very unkind. What is he doing now?"

"In all probability he is asleep, or, if not asleep, dreaming."

"And what have they been doing all the evening?"

"Dancing."

"The famous ballet? How did De Guiche look?"

"Superb!"

"Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle Montalais; but all I now have to do is to pass from where I now am to your apartment."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot suppose that the door of the château will be opened for me at this hour; and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare it is impossible for any other animal than a boaconstrictor to do it."

"But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner."

"Two, if you please," said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Montalais, "who is that speaking to me?"

"Malicorne, Mademoiselle Montalais."

And as Malicorne spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the height of the wall.

"Monsieur Malicorne! why, you are both mad!"

"How do you do, Mademoiselle Montalais?" inquired Malicorne.

"I needed but this!" said Montalais, in despair.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Montalais," murmured Malicorne; "do not be so severe, I beseech you."

"In fact," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night on these branches, is in fact, condemning us to death."

"Oh!" said Montalais, "Monsieur Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will

be a just punishment for the trick he has played me."

"Be it so, then; let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over," said Manicamp. And bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, by the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavored to maintain his position, and, moreover, he succeeded. Having taken possession of the ladder, he stepped on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on, Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one which he now occupied. Manicamp and Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting.

Suddenly Malicorne's voice was heard in tones of entreaty:—

"I entreat you, Mademoiselle Montalais, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and some accident will be certain to befall me, if I attempt unaided to reach the other side of the wall; it does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche's wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn."

"My opinion," said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne's lamentations, "is that the best thing to be done is to go and look for De Guiche without delay, for, by and by, perhaps, I may not be able to get to his apartments."

"That is my own opinion too," replied Montalais: "so, go at once, Monsieur Manicamp."

"A thousand thanks. Adieu, Mademoiselle Montalais,"

said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; "your condescension cannot be repaid."

"Farewell, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne."

Malicorne sighed. Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, he said, "By the by, how do I get to M. de Guiche's apartments?"

"Nothing easier. You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross."

"Yes."

"You will see four paths."

"Exactly."

"One of which you will take."

"Which of them?"

"That to the right."

"To the right?"

"No, to the left."

"The deuce!"

"No, no, wait a minute——"

"You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg."

"You take the middle path."

"But there are *four*."

"So there are. All that I know is, that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame's apartments; and that one I am well acquainted with."

"But M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then the path which leads to Madame's apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for the one that leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating it from where we are, it is quite impossible."

"Well, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path."

"In that case, you are almost there, for you have nothing else to do but to cross the labyrinth."

"*Nothing* more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well."

"Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived,—there are turnings and windings without end: in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once—stay, is it once or twice, though? at all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth, you will see an avenue of sycamores, and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Nothing could be more clearly indicated," said Manicamp; "and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions, I should lose my way immediately. I have, therefore, a slight service to ask of you."

"What may that be?"

"That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another—like another—I used to know mythology, but other important matters have made me forget it; pray come with me, then?"

"And am I to be abandoned, then?" cried Malicorne.

"It is quite impossible, monsieur," said Montalais to Manicamp; "if I were to be seen with you at such an hour, what would be said of me?"

"Your own conscience would acquit you," said Manicamp, sententiously.

"Impossible, monsieur, impossible."

"In that case, let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent; he will guide me, and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are

together, and should be met by any one, we shall look as if we had some matter of business in hand; whilst alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or a robber. Come, Malicorne, here is the ladder."

Malicorne had already stretched out one of his legs towards the top of the wall, when Manicamp said, in a whisper, "Hush!"

"What's the matter?" inquired Montalais.

"I hear footsteps."

"Good heavens!"

In fact, the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and Saint-Aignan appeared, with a smile on his lips, and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise; that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the rounds of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. "Good-evening, Manicamp," said the comte, "I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant."

Montalais blushed. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.

"Pray reassure yourself; I know how perfectly innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me: the hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth, I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There now, your mythological name is found at last."

"Perfectly true, comte."

"And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time," said Montalais.

"No, indeed," said Malicorne; "M. Manicamp has conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my

turn, if you please; I have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects."

"You hear," said the comte, laughing; "stay with him, Mademoiselle Montalais. This is, indeed, a night for secrets." And, taking Manicamp's arm, the comte led him rapidly away in the direction of the road Montalais knew so well, and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MALICORNE HAD BEEN TURNED OUT OF THE HOTEL OF THE BEAU PAON.

WHILE Montalais was engaged in looking after the comte and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable, and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place; for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, with his feet resting upon the top rounds of the ladder, the foliage of the wild vine and honeysuckle curled round his head like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably enough his cloven feet. Montalais required nothing to make her resemblance to a dryad as complete as possible. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"

"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, Monsieur Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."

"I?"

"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orleans your place of residence?"

"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."

"Ah, great need of that."

"Not as far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but as far as I am concerned, Mademoiselle Montalais, you know very well that I have left my home, and that, for the future, I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you, therefore, are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "You wished to see me, did you not?" she said.

"Of course."

"Very well, you have seen me,—you are satisfied; so now go away."

"Oh, no," said Malicorne; "I came to talk with you as well as to see you."

"Very well, we will talk by and by, and in another place than this."

"By and by! heaven only knows if shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this."

"But I cannot this evening, nor at the present moment."

"Why not?"

"Because a thousand things have happened to-night."

"Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one."

"No no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance."

"How long has she been waiting?"

"For an hour at least."

"In that case," said Malicorne, tranquilly, "she can wait a few minutes longer."

"Monsieur Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are forgetting yourself."

"You should rather say that it is you who are forgetting me, and that I am getting impatient at the part you make me play here indeed! For the last week I have been prowling about among the company, and you have not once deigned to notice my presence."

"Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?"

"Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burnt by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps, or the spray from the fountains,—half-famished, fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel, a salamander, nor an otter; and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I declare it openly. A man I am, indeed, and a man I will remain, unless by superior orders."

"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish,—what do you require,—what do you insist upon?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know I was at Fontainebleau?"

"I!"

"Nay, be frank."

"I suspected so."

"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day, at least?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Ask my companion, if you do not believe me."

"I shall ask no one to explain matters, I know better than any one."

"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne; things will change."

"They must indeed."

"You know that, whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? well, and is there anything new?"

"What about?"

"About my post in Monsieur's household."

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal highness."

"Well, but now?"

"Now, it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."

"Bah! how has his jealousy subsided?"

"It has been diverted into another channel."

"Tell me all about it."

"A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillized immediately."

"And who spread the report?"

Montalais lowered her voice. "Between ourselves," she said, "I think that Madame and the king have come to a secret understanding about it."

"Ah!" said Malicorne; "that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?"

"Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off."

"Have they been writing to each other?"

"No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week."

"On what terms are you with Madame?"

"The very best."

"And with the king?"

"The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him."

"Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve as their screen?"

"La Vallière."

"Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that!"

"Why?"

"Because, if M. Raoul Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself."

"Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?"

"Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people's affections," said Malicorne, "and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds and hearts. Well, I can tell you, that M. de Bragelonne loves La Vallière to such a degree that, if she deceived him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her."

"But the king is there to defend her," said Montalais.

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne; "Raoul would kill the king as he would a common thief."

"Good heavens!" said Montalais; "you are mad, M. Malicorne."

"Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious; and, for my own part, I know one thing."

"What is that?"

"That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick."

"Hush!" said Montalais, mounting another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely, "do not open your lips to poor Raoul."

"Why not?"

"Because, as yet you know nothing at all."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Why, this evening—but no one is listening, I hope?"

"No."

"This evening, then, beneath the royal oak, La Vallière said aloud, and innocently enough, 'I cannot conceive that

when one has once seen the king, one can ever love another man.”

Malicorne almost jumped off the wall. “Unhappy girl! did she really say that?”

“Word for word.”

“And she thinks so?”

“La Vallière always thinks what she says.”

“That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are the veriest serpents,” said Malicorne,

“Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself.”

“No, no; let us take the evil in time, on the contrary. There is time enough yet to tell Raoul of it.”

“Blunderer, on the contrary, it is too late,” replied Montalais.

“How so?”

“La Vallière’s remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination.”

“The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?”

“The king heard it.”

“*Ohimé!* as the cardinal used to say.”

“The king was hidden in the thicket close to the royal oak.”

“It follows, then,” said Malicorne, “that for the future, the plan which the king and Madame have arranged, will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne’s body.”

“Precisely so.”

“Well,” said Malicorne, after a moment’s reflection, “do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces.”

“The very thing I was going to say to you.”

“Let us think of ourselves, then.”

"My own idea."

"Open your beautiful eyes, then."

"And you your large ears."

"Approach your little mouth for a kiss."

"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immediately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Vallière, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Vallière: lastly Monsieur, who loves no one but himself. Among all these loves, a noodle would make his fortune: a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."

"There you are with your dreams again."

"Nay, rather with realities. Let me still lead you, darling. I do not think you have been very badly off hitherto."

"No."

"Well, the future is guaranteed by the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too."

"Perfectly right."

"But of ourselves only."

"Be it so."

"An offensive and defensive alliance."

"I am ready to swear it."

"Put out your hand, then, and say, 'All for Malicorne.'"

"All for Malicorne."

"And I, 'All for Montalais,'" replied Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

"And now, what is to be done?"

"Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be serviceable against others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves."

"Agreed."

"Decided."

"Sworn to. And now the agreement entered into, good-bye."

"What do you mean by 'good-bye'?"

"Of course you can now return to your inn."

"To my inn?"

"Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?"

"Montalais, Montalais, you now betray that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau."

"Well; and what does that prove, except that I occupied myself about you more than you deserve?"

"Hum!"

"Go back, then, to the Beau Paon."

"That is now quite out of the question."

"Have you not a room there?"

"I had, but have it no longer."

"Who has taken it from you, then?"

"I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk."

"A monk?"

"Yes, an old gray-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at the monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed, and as I reached the top of the staircase I observed that they took him into my room."

"Into your room?"

"Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who said that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth."

"Oh, oh!"

"That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went up stairs again. I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of the step; when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and, in a voice which was admirably suited for commanding a charge of cavalry, said, 'Turn this fellow out of doors;' which was done immediately by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging."

"Who can this Franciscan be?" said Montalais. "Is he a general?"

"That is exactly the very title that one of the bearers of the litter gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone."

"So that——" said Montalais.

"So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air."

"What is to be done, then?" said Montalais.

"Nothing easier," said a third voice; whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and Saint-Aignan appeared. "Dear Monsieur Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, "a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, which, I can assure you, no Franciscan will deprive you of. As for you, my dear young lady, rest easy. I already knew Mademoiselle de la Vallière's secret, and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me; for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one." Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like children

detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of assent, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step on the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away like a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to lead her wrong. As for Saint-Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have close at hand the very two men who, even supposing De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honor.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT ACTUALLY OCCURRED AT THE INN CALLED THE BEAU PAON.

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called the Beau Paon. It owed its name to its sign, which represented a peacock spreading its tail. But, in imitation of certain painters who bestowed the face of a handsome young man on the serpent which tempted Eve, the limner of this sign had conferred upon the peacock the features of a woman. This famous inn, an architectural epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides the road from Paris, the large artery that constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it led in the

direction of the second capital of the kingdom. The street itself was composed of two houses occupied by persons of the class of tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges running round them. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain, notwithstanding appearances, how there were in fact only two. The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon there were two ranges of buildings divided by courtyards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travelers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise, or opportunities of solitude for even the wealthiest courtiers, whenever, after having received some check at the court, they wished to shut themselves up to their own society, either to devour an affront, or to brood on revenge. From the windows of this part of the building travelers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowery arms, the houses of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the groundwork of the picture, and appearing an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain, by the main street from Paris, a view of, as well as to hear, the passers-by and the *fêtes*; and, by the Rue de Lyon, to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country. And this without reckoning that, in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment people might be knocking at the

principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and, creeping along the gardens of the private houses, attain the outskirts of the forest. Malicorne, who, it will be remembered, was the first to speak about this inn, by way of deploring his being turned out of it, being then absorbed in his own affairs, had not told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair the omission. With the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, Malicorne had not given any particulars about the travelers who were staying in the inn. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travelers, of entering the hotel without a password, or living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne; and, we will venture to say, really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had personal matters of his own to occupy his attention, which prevented him from paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never stirred out, who were incommunicative in their address, with countenances full of thoughtful preoccupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travelers had reached the hotel after his own arrival there; each man had entered after having given a kind of password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired, in an indirect manner, about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally

happened that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind, and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, when he had observed, since his residence there, admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that Manicamp, who, in his opinion, must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, having wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there, both horse and rider had been incontinently turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind being fully occupied by his own love affair and personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture, notwithstanding the intelligence we have accorded as his due, to say he would have succeeded. A few words will prove to the reader that no one but Œdipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week, seven travelers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following:—

First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte de Wostpur.—A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia.—A rich merchant of Bremen, with his man-servant and two horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett.—A Venetian senator, with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini.—A Scotch laird, with seven Highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor.—An Austrian from Vienna, without

title or coat-of-arms, who had arrived in a carriage; a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called the Councilor.—And, finally, a Flemish lady, with a man-servant, a lady's maid, and a female companion, a large retinue of servants, great display, and immense horses. She was called the Flemish lady.

All these travelers had arrived on the same day, and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street; their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by their couriers or secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or that very morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the *fêtes*, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, "Since you are the first arrival, monsieur, choose what apartment you please." And this was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means, "Make yourself perfectly easy, monsieur: we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly." These words, and their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused, on account of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper's remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling as a man would do for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, "My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house."

"With a stable?"

"Yes, with a stable."

"And when will you take it?"

"Immediately, if it be possible."

"Quite so."

"But," said Malicorne, "I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present."

"Very good!" said the landlord, with an air of intelligence.

"Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, this small room only."

"Yes, yes," said the host.

"When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment: and, as a matter of course, as this larger apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself."

"Certainly," said the landlord, "certainly; let it be understood in that manner."

"It is agreed, then, that such shall be the terms?"

"Word for word."

"It is extraordinary," said Malicorne to himself. "You quite understand, then?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing more to be said. Since you understand, for you do clearly understand, do you not?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well; and now show me to my room."

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord, at every ascent or descent, looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them. There is some mistake here," said Malicorne to himself; "but until it is cleared up, I shall take advantage of it,

which is the best thing I can possibly do." And he darted out of his room, like a hunting-dog following a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burnt in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his room, he had noticed the seven travelers arrive successively, who speedily filled the whole hotel. When he saw this perfect multitude of people, of carriages, and retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that, one day later, he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travelers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne's room, and with his accustomed courteousness, said to him, "You are aware, my dear monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you?"

"Of course I am aware of it."

"I am really making you a present of it."

"Thank you."

"So that when your friend comes——"

"Well!"

"He will be satisfied with me, I hope: or, if he be not, he will be very difficult to please."

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?"

"Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so."

"He intended to come, as you know."

"And he does so still."

"He may possibly have changed his opinion."

"No."

"You are quite sure, then?"

"Quite sure."

"But in case you should have some doubt."

"Well!"

"I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come."

"Yet he told you——"

"He certainly did tell me; but you know that man proposes and God disposes,—*verba volant, scripta manent.*"

"Which is as much as to say——"

"That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and, as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, 'I will authorize you, yet without specially instructing you,' you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position."

"What do you authorize me to do, then?"

"Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Never will I do such a thing, monsieur. If he has not written to you, he has written to me."

"Ah! what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words."

"These are almost his very words. "To the landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel,—You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your inn between some people of importance; I shall be one of those who will meet the others at Fontainebleau. Keep for me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me——' and you are the friend I suppose," said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord continued: "And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair, but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor." It is still you he is speaking of, is he not?" said the host.

"Oh, certainly," said Malicorne.

"Then we are agreed ; your friend will settle for his apartment, and you for your own."

"May I be broken alive on the wheel," said Malicorne to himself, "if I understand anything at all about it," and then he said aloud, "Well, then, are you satisfied, with the name?"

"With what name?"

"With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?"

"I was going to ask you the name."

"What ! was not the letter signed?"

"No," said the landlord, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.

"In that case," replied Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look, "if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it."

"Oh, of course."

"And, therefore, I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray him."

"You are perfectly right, monsieur," said the landlord, "and I do not insist upon it."

"I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair, so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make long friends. How much is it?"

"There is no hurry."

"Never mind, let us reckon it up all the same. Room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?"

"Four livres, monsieur."

"Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here ?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Here are your twelve livres, then."

"But why settle now?"

"Because," said Malicorne, lowering his voice, and resorting to his former air of mystery, because he saw that the mysterious had succeeded, "because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be settled."

"You are right, monsieur."

"I may consider myself at home, then?"

"Perfectly."

"So far so well. Adieu!" And the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner:—"No one but De Guiche or Manicamp could have written to this fellow; De Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case might be; Manicamp, because De Guiche must have intrusted him with his commission. And De Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner. The large apartment would serve for the reception, in a befitting manner, of a lady thickly veiled, reserving to the lady in question a double means of exit, either in a street somewhat deserted, or closely adjoining the forest. The smaller room, might either shelter Manicamp for a time, who is De Guiche's confidant, and would be the vigilant keeper of the door, or De Guiche himself, acting, for greater safety, the part of master and confidant at the same time. Yet," he continued, "how about this meeting which is to take place, and which indeed has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the 'poor devil,' for whom the smaller room is destined, is a trick, in order to better conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case, as very likely it is, there is only half the mischief done, for there is simply the length of a purse string between Manicamp and Malicorne."

After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne slept soundly, leaving the seven travelers to occupy, and in every sense of the word to walk up and down, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to put him out, when he had wearied himself with his excursions and investigations, tired of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering to the people they were intended for, he returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, began to think over these strange travelers, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions with all its illuminations, amusements, and *fêtes*. Things went on in this manner until the seventh day, a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at his window, towards one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback, with a thoughtful and listless air.

"Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognizing him at the first glance; "there's my friend, who is come to take possession of his apartment, that is to say, of my room." And he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognized Malicorne.

"Ah! by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up, "glad to see you, Malicorne. I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find: De Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but as far as concerns your room and a stable, that's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."

"Retained—and by whom?"

"By yourself, I presume."

"By *me*?"

"Do you mean to say you did not take lodgings here?"

"By no means," said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared on the threshold of the door.

"I want a room," said Manicamp.

"Did you engage one, monsieur?"

"No."

"Then I have no rooms to let."

"In that case, I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.

"A room simply, or lodgings?"

"Anything you please."

"By letter?" inquired the landlord.

Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp.

"Of course by letter," said Manicamp. "Did you not receive a letter from me?"

"What was the date of the letter?" inquired the host, in whom Manicamp's hesitation had aroused suspicion. Manicamp rubbed his ear, and looked up at Malicorne's window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend's assistance. At the very same moment, a traveler, wrapped in a large Spanish cloak, appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation.

"I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?" repeated the landlord, pressing the question.

"Last Wednesday was the date," said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder.

Manicamp drew back, and it was now Malicorne's turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear. The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognizes his true guest.

"Monsieur," he said to him, with civility, "your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too, only—" He looked round him and inquired, "Your horses?"

"My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged." The landlord bowed still lower.

"You have," continued the unknown traveler, "kept for me, in addition, the small room I asked for."

"Oh!" said Malicorne, endeavoring to hide himself.

"Your friend has occupied it during the last week," said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible. The traveler, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, "This gentleman is no friend of mine."

The landlord started violently.

"I am not acquainted with this gentleman," continued the traveler.

"What!" exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, "are you not this gentleman's friend, then?"

"What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?" said Malicorne, parodying the stranger's remark in a very majestic manner.

"It matters so far as this," said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, "that I beg you, monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some one else instead of you."

"Still," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment: if he prefers the apartment, I will be satisfied with the room."

"I am exceedingly distressed, monsieur," said the

traveler, in his soft voice, "but I need both the room and the apartment."

"At least, tell me for whom?" inquired Malicorne.

"The apartment I require for myself."

"Very well; but the room?"

"Look," said the traveler pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching.

Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his apartment he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavored to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the stranger, and of the sick Franciscan, was Malicorne's expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn, by the landlord and the peasants who had carried the Franciscan. The details have already been given of what followed this expulsion; of Manicamp's conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche, of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne, and, finally, of the billets with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who was the traveler in the cloak—the principal tenant of the double apartment, of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion;—and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger, unfortunately upset the two friends' plans.

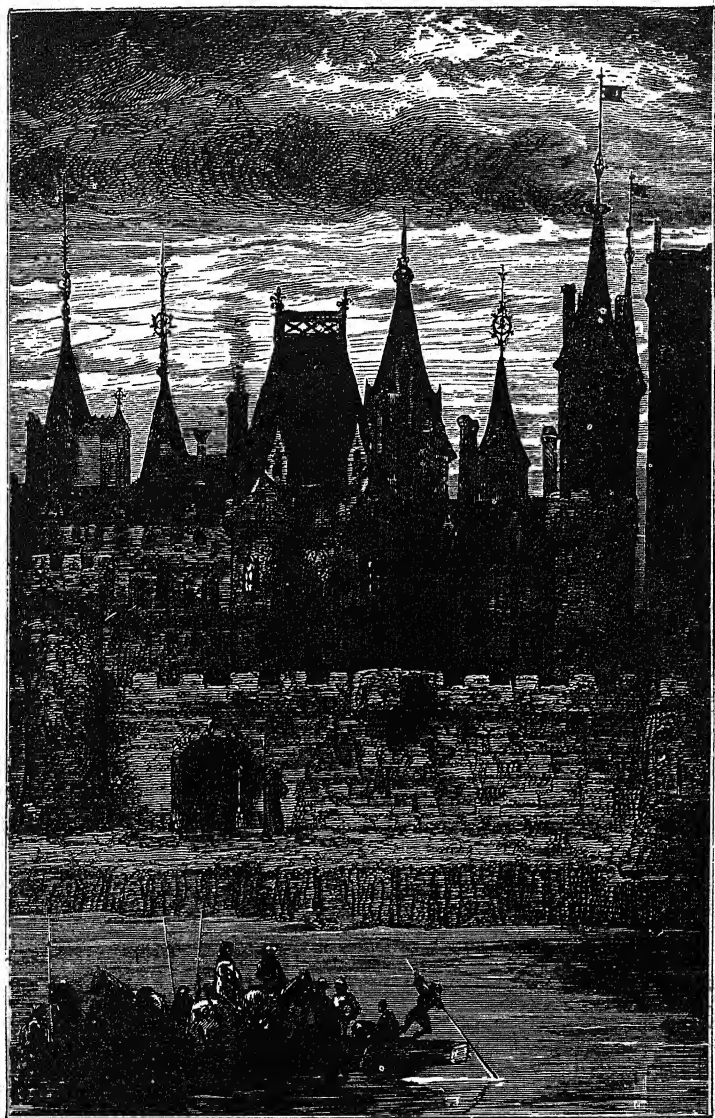
CHAPTER XVII.

A JESUIT OF THE ELEVENTH YEAR.

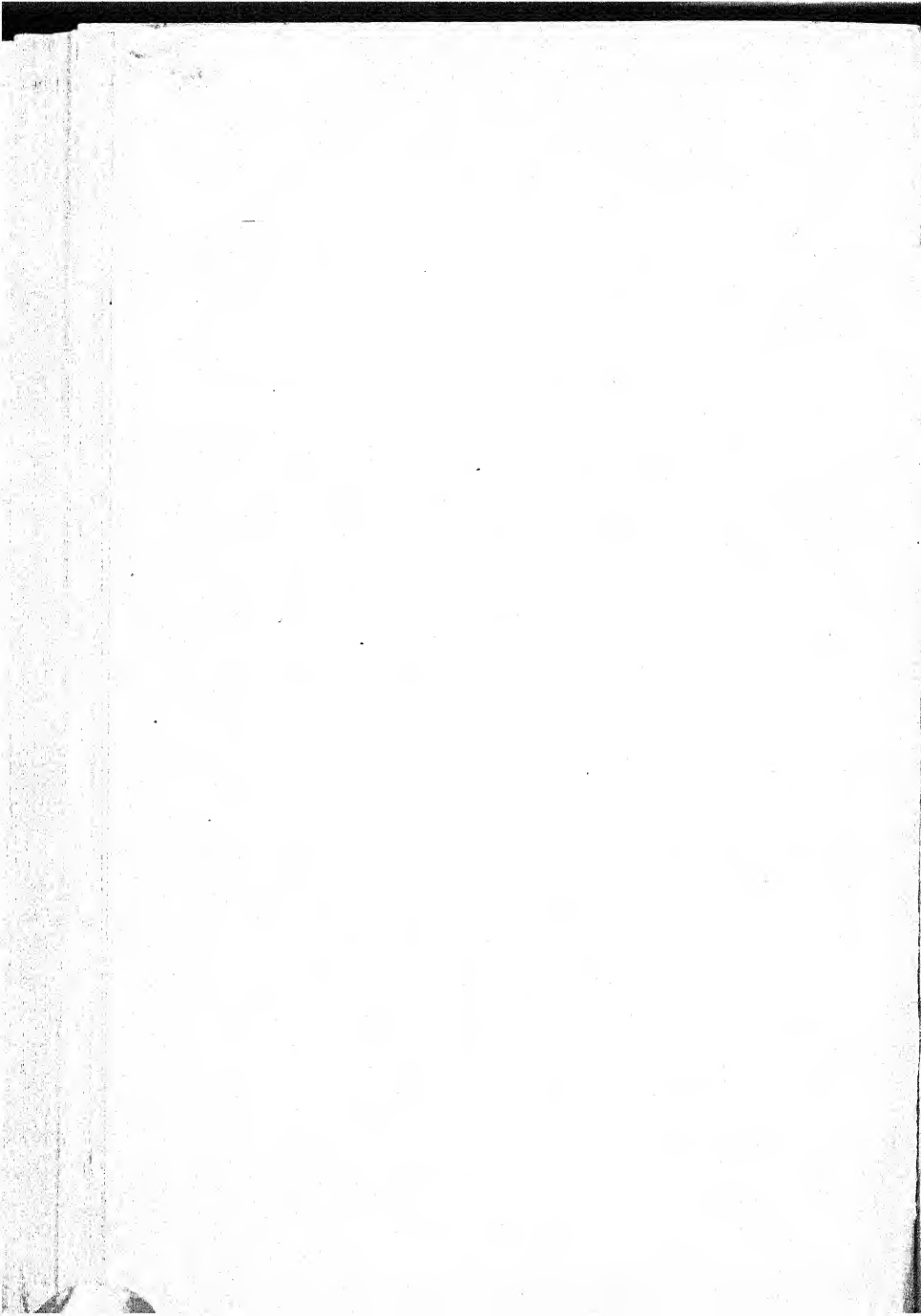
IN the first place, in order not to weary the reader's patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveler with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who, after he had left Fouquet, and taken from a port-manteau, which his servant had opened, a cavalier's complete costume, quitted the château, and went to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where, by letters, seven or eight days previously, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him. Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first, and the apartment on the second floor.

"The room, then," he said.

Aramis did not contradict him, but, with great submissiveness, said to the landlord: "The room." And bowing with respect, he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the church for a simple monk, for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order; to whom was given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travelers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, explain the unexpected arrival of Aramis at the hotel—he who had entered the château with M. Fouquet,



THE LOUVRE.



and could have remained at the château with M. Fouquet if he had liked? The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident he suffered very much, and that every time the litter knocked against the wall or the railing of the staircase, he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame. And finally, when he had arrived in the room, he said to those who carried him: "Help me to place myself in that arm-chair." The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man up as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was situated at the head of the bed. "Now," he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, "desire the landlord to come."

They obeyed, and five minutes afterwards the landlord appeared at the door.

"Be kind enough," said the Franciscan to him, "to send these excellent fellows away; they are vassals of the Comte de Melun. They found me when I had fainted on the road overcome by the heat, and without thinking whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own homes. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick man, and I preferred this hotel, where, moreover, I was expected."

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement, but the latter, with his thumb, made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. "Yes indeed," he said, "we did expect you, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health." And as the peasants were looking at the innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket three or four pieces of gold, which he held out.

"My friends," said he, "here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am traveling, does not require me to beg; only, as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace."

The peasants did not dare to take them; the landlord took the two louis out of the monk's hand and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed; and, while the innkeeper stood respectfully near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and agitated fingers across his beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and inquietude, seemed to pursue in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea.

"What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?" he inquired, after a long pause.

"We have three, holy father."

"What are their names?"

"Luiniquet first."

"The next one?"

"A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert."

"The next?"

"A secular member, named Grisart."

"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk, "send for M. Grisart immediately."

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

"Tell me what priests are there here?"

"What priests?"

"Yes; belonging to what orders?"

"There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers ; but the Jesuits are the closest at hand. Shall I send for a confessor belonging to the order of Jesuits?"

"Yes, immediately."

It will be imagined that, at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged, the landlord and the invalid monk had recognized each other as two affiliated members of the well-known Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage ; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with his head thrown backwards and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise they made in entering the room, the current of air, which the opening of the door occasioned, restored the Franciscan to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of the papers which were lying about, and with his long and bony hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

"Come here, Monsieur Grisart," said the Franciscan to the doctor ; "approach closer, for there is no time to lose. Try, by touch and sound, and consider, and pronounce your sentence."

"The landlord," replied the doctor, "told me that I had the honor of attending an affiliated brother."

"Yes," replied the Franciscan, "it is so. Tell me the truth, then ; I feel very ill, and I think I am about to die."

The physician took the monk's hand and felt his pulse. "Oh, oh," he said, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you call a dangerous fever?" inquired the Franciscan, with an imperious look.

"To an affiliated member of the first or second year," replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, "I should say—a fever that may be cured."

"But to me?" said the Franciscan. The physician hesitated.

"Look at my gray hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought," he continued: "look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone; I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, Monsieur Grisart." The physician started, for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order, one of those for whom science has no more secrets, the society no further barriers to present—temporal obedience, no more trammels.

"In that case," said Grisart, saluting him with respect, "I am in the presence of a master?"

"Yes; act, therefore, accordingly."

"And you wish to know?"

"My real state."

"Well," said the physician, "it is a brain fever, which has reached its highest degree of intensity."

"There is no hope, then?" inquired the Franciscan, in a quick tone of voice.

"I do not say that," replied the doctor; "yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you——"

"And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning," said the monk.

"All things considered, I shall call it a terrible attack. But why did you not stop on your road?"

"I was expected here, and I was obliged to come."

"Even at the risk of your life?"

"Yes, at the risk of dying on the way."

"Very well. Considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate."

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner.

"What you have just told me is, perhaps, sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, Monsieur Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if you were making your own confession to Heaven. Besides I have already sent for a confessor."

"Oh! I have hopes, however," murmured the doctor.

"Answer me," said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had, until that moment, been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered a loud exclamation. "The general!" he cried.

"Silence," said the Franciscan, "you now understand that the whole truth is all important."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured Grisart, "send for the confessor, for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in its course."

"Very well," said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows, "I have still two hours to live then?"

"Yes; particularly if you take the potion I will send you presently."

"And that will give me two hours of life?"

"Two hours."

"I would take it, were it poison, for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the glory of the order."

"What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!" murmured the physician.

"It is the loss of one man—nothing more," replied the Franciscan, "for Heaven will enable the poor monk, who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; already even, through the goodness of Heaven, I have met with you. A physician who had not been one of our holy order, would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and, confident that existence would be prolonged a few days further, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, Monsieur Grisart, and that confers an honor upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; send me the cordial immediately."

"Give me your blessing, at least, monseigneur."

"In my mind, I do; go, go; in my mind, I do so, I tell you—*animo*, Maître Grisart, *viribus impossibile*." And he again fell back on the arm-chair, in an almost senseless state. M. Grisart hesitated, whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He decided in favor of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STATE SECRET.

A FEW moments after the doctor's departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look

upon him, and, shaking his head, murmured—"A weak mind I see; may Heaven forgive me if I die without the help of this living piece of human infirmity." The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment they were about to close, nor looks so terrible at the moment they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious movement of his hand. "Sit down, there, my father," he said, "and listen to me." The Jesuit confessor, a good priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had merely seen the beginning of its mysteries, yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent.

"There are several persons staying in this hotel," continued the Franciscan.

"But," inquired the Jesuit, "I thought I had been summoned to listen to a confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?"

"Why do you ask?"

"In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret."

"My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor."

"Very well," said the priest, seating himself on the chair which the Franciscan had, with great difficulty, just left, to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued,—"I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn."

"So I have heard."

"They ought to be eight in number."

The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. "The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, whose name is the Baron de Wostpur. Be kind enough to go to him, and tell him the person he expected has arrived." The confessor, as-

tounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one.

"Obey," said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist. The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room. As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already, once before, obliged him to put aside.

"The Baron de Wostpur? Good!" he said; "ambitious, a fool and straitened in means."

He folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron de Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as if he were discussing with himself the possibility of touching the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, at the appearance of the Franciscan, at his melancholy look, and seeing the plainness of the room, he stopped, and inquired—"Who summoned me?"

"I," said the Franciscan, who turned towards the confessor, saying, "My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here." The Jesuit left the room, and, doubtless, availed himself of this momentary exile from the presence of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a man servant. The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak, but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him.

"Every moment is precious," said the latter, hurriedly. "You have come here for the competition, have you not?"

"Yes, my father."

"You hope to be elected general of the order?"

"I hope so."

"You know on what conditions only you can possibly

attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of Popes?"

"Who are you," inquired the baron, "to subject me to these interrogatories?"

"I am he whom you expected."

"The elector-general?"

"I am the elected."

"You are——"

The Franciscan did not give him time to reply; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order. The baron drew back in surprise; and then, immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed—"Is it possible that you are here, monseigneur; you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general, that is, your own successor?"

"Do not distress yourself about that, monsieur, but fulfil immediately the principal condition, of furnishing the order with a secret of importance, of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe will, by your instrumentality, forever be subjected to the order. Well! do you possess the secret which you promised, in your request, addressed to the grand council?"

"Monseigneur——"

"Let us proceed, however, in due order," said the monk. "You are the Baron de Wostpur?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And this letter is from you?"

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, "Yes, monseigneur, this letter is mine."

"Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the grand council returned to you?"

"Here it is," said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, "To his excellency the Baron de Wostpur," and containing only this phrase, "From the 15th to the 22nd May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau-Paon.—A.M.D.G." *

"Right," said the Franciscan, "and now speak."

"I have a body of troops, composed of 50,000 men; all the officers are gained over. I am encamped on the Danube. In four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon." The Franciscan listened, unmoved.

"Is that all?" he said.

"A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan," said the baron.

"Very well, Monsieur de Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour." The baron withdrew backwards, as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor he was ready to betray.

"There is no secret there," murmured the Franciscan, "it is a plot. Besides," he added, after a moment's reflection, "the future of Europe is no longer in the hands of the House of Austria."

And with a pencil he held in his hand, he struck the Baron de Wostpur's name from the list.

"Now for the cardinal," he said; "we ought to get something more serious from the side of Spain."

Raising his head, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as respectfully as a school-boy.

"Ah, ah!" he said, noticing his submissive air, "you have been talking with the landlord."

"Yes, monseigneur; and to the physician."

"To Grisart?"

"Yes."

"He is here, then?"

"He is waiting with the potion he promised."

"Very well; if I require him, I will call; you now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste. Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint."

"Shall I summon the physician?"

"Not yet, not yet . . . the Spanish cardinal no one else. Fly."

Five minutes afterwards, the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room.

"I am informed, monseigneur——" stammered the cardinal.

"To the point," said the Franciscan, in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the Grand Council. "Is that your handwriting?"

"Yes, but——"

"And your summons?"

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan, who stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the greatness of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence.

"Quick, the secret, the secret!" said the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.

"*Coram isto?*" inquired the Spanish cardinal.

"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, showing the liveliest attention.

"You are aware, monseigneur," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in Castilian, "that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the king of France was the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said Infanta, as well as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain." The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative.

"The consequence is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract." A similar sign from the Franciscan. "Not only France and Spain," continued the cardinal, "but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party." Another movement of the dying man's head.

"It further results," continued the speaker, "that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man; that is to say, the idea of future good or evil, would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the event, which has no fixed certainty even in the brain of him who originated it, could be turned to the advantage of our order."

"Closer!" murmured the Franciscan, in Spanish, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest. The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said, "Well, monseigneur, I know that the king of France has determined that, at the very first pretext, a death for instance, either that of the King of Spain or that of a brother of the Infanta, France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance, and I have in my possession already prepared the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for this occasion."

"And this plan?" said the Franciscan.

"Here it is," returned the cardinal.

"In whose handwriting is it?"

"My own."

"Have you anything further to say to me?"

"I think I have said a good deal, my lord," replied the cardinal.

"Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details, by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?"

"I have the under-servants of the king of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burnt."

"Very ingenious," murmured the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile; "you will leave this hotel, cardinal, in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you." The cardinal withdrew.

"Call Grisart, and desire the Venetian Marini to come," said the sick man.

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal's name, as he had done the baron's, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two predecessors, hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers, but his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe, in order to obtain their assistance. He described the pontiff's auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the

Archipelago, where, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals, adepts of the eleventh year, and, consequently, high in authority, were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members of Rome. The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to set off in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As, however, he was departing, the Franciscan murmured to himself:—"All these men are either spies, or a sort of police, not one of them a general; they have all discovered a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin, or war, or force, that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence moral superiority alone confers. No, the man is not yet found, and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order; that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? for that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendor." These words, which had been half-reflected, half-pronounced aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever, whilst Grisart, with a mind of a higher order, devoured them as the revelations of an unknown world, in which his looks were plunged without ability to comprehend. Suddenly the Franciscan recovered himself.

"Let us finish this," he said; "death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped . . . while now I sink in despair, unless those who remain . . .

Grisart, Grisart, give me to live a single hour longer."

Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a small bottle he had upon his person.

"Call the Scotchman!" exclaimed the Franciscan; "call the Bremen merchant. Call, call, quickly. I am dying. I am suffocated."

The confessor darted forward to seek assistance, as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which was weighing down the sick man; but, at the threshold of the door, he found Aramis, who, with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by looks, made a movement as if to push Aramis aside, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places.

"A chief!" they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the agony which had seized him. As for the Franciscan, whether owing to the effect of the elixir, or whether the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up upon the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling; the windows were closed; the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and still further increased, by their thick smoke, the temperature of the room. Aramis opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect, said to him: "Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you

summoned me, but your state alarms me, and I thought you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am but the sixth upon your list."

The dying man started and looked at the list.

"You are, therefore, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since, the Chevalier d'Herblay? You are the bishop of Vannes?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I know you, I have seen you."

"At the last jubilee, we were with the Holy Father together."

"Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?"

"Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great state secret, and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favor of the person who should be the depositary of such a secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret I believe to be important."

"Speak," said the Franciscan; "I am ready to listen to you, and to judge of the importance of the secret."

"A secret of the value of that which I have the honor to confide to you cannot be communicated by word of mouth. Any idea which, when once expressed, has thereby lost its safeguard, and has become vulgarized by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some listener, or perhaps by an enemy; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for, in such a case, the secret would cease to be one."

"How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?" inquired the dying monk.

With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to

the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope. "Is not writing more dangerous still than language?"

"No, my lord," said Aramis, "for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand." The Franciscan looked at Aramis with an astonishment which momentarily increased.

"It is a cipher," continued the latter, "which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Ivan Injan, who is dead, could alone decipher, if he were restored to life."

"You knew this cipher, then?"

"It was I who taught it him," said Aramis, bowing with a gracefulness full of respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room: but a gesture of the Franciscan, accompanied by a cry for him to remain, restrained him.

"*Ecce homo!*" he exclaimed; then reading the paper a second time, he called out, "Approach, approach quickly!"

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner, unchanged. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burnt by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then, taking hold of Aramis's hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired:—"In what manner and by whose means could you possibly become acquainted with such a secret?"

"Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and *confidante* of the queen."

"And Madame de Chevreuse——"

"Is dead."

"Did any others know it?"

"A man and a woman only, and they of the lower classes."

"Who are they?"

"Persons who had brought him up."

"What has become of them?"

"Dead also. This secret burns like vitriol."

"But you survive?"

"No one is aware that I know it."

"And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?"

"For the last fifteen years."

"And you have kept it?"

"I wished to live."

"And you give it to the order without ambition, without acknowledgment?"

"I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return," said Aramis; "for if you live, my lord, you will make of me, now you know me, what I can and ought to be."

"And as I am dying," exclaimed the Franciscan, "I constitute you my successor Thus." And drawing off the ring, he passed it on Aramis's finger. Then, turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said; "Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body, but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d'Herblay, bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before Heaven, prostrate myself, as an example for all to follow." And the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, whilst the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, even while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the actors of this scene. Profoundly gratified ambition flowed with life-blood toward his heart.

"We must lose no time," said the Franciscan; "what I had still to do on earth was urgent. I shall never succeed in carrying it out."

"I will do it," said Aramis.

"It is well," said the Franciscan, and then turning towards the Jesuit and the doctor, he added, "Leave us alone," a direction they instantly obeyed.

"With this sign," he said, "you are the man needed to shake the world from one end to the other; with this sign you will overthrow; with this sign you will edify; *in hoc signo vinces!*"

"Close the door," continued the Franciscan after a pause. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned to the side of the Franciscan.

"The pope is conspiring against the order," said the monk, "the pope must die."

"He shall die," said Aramis, quietly.

"Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Bonstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature."

"He shall be paid," said Aramis.

"Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered by the indiscretion of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the three mysteries; it must be ascertained what these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and bury it."

"It shall be done."

"Three dangerous affiliated members must be sent away into Thibet, there to perish; they stand condemned. Here are their names."

"I will see that the sentence be carried out."

"Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-niece of Ravallac; she holds certain papers in her hands that compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers for a sum of money paid down, or in case of refusal, stop the pension—but run no risk."

"I will quickly decide what is best to be done," said Aramis.

"A vessel chartered from Lima entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen millions of livres; you will see that it is claimed; here are the bills of lading."

"To what port shall I direct it to be taken?"

"To Bayonne."

"Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?" The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak; the blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis's hand, when he fell in convulsions from his bed upon the floor. Aramis placed his hand upon the Franciscan's heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, Aramis observed that a fragment of the paper he had given the Franciscan had escaped being burnt. He picked it up, and burnt it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former:—"Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burials bestowed upon the pious dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go."

The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice:—"Monsieur Grisart, empty and clean this glass; *there is too much left in it of what the grand council desired you to put in.*"

Grizart amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass and

poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MISSION.

THE next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described were concluded only at three o'clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine, and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those celebrated baths with which the ladies of the court were so infatuated, as, in fact, no one remained in the château, with the exception of Madame, who, under the pretext of indisposition, would not leave her room; Montalais was seen, or rather was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, leading La Vallière after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible, and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket. The weather was cloudy, a warm breeze bowed the flowers and the shrubs, the burning dust, swept along in clouds by the wind, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who, during their progress, had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps further, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, "Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if

we were plague-stricken." La Vallière bent down her head and sighed. "It is positively unheard of," continued Montalais; "from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us take counsel, you and I, together, in order that I may know what to do."

La Vallière lifted towards her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a spring sky, "And I," she said, "will ask you why have we been summoned to Madame's own room? Why have we slept close to her apartment, instead of sleeping as usual in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning, with respect to us both?"

"My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather, by ten others, which is not answering me at all. I will tell you all you want to know later, and as it is of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you—for everything will depend upon that—is, whether there is or is not any secret?"

"I do not know if there is any secret," said La Vallière; "but I do know, for my own part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us."

"Speak for yourself," said Montalais, laughing, "speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies, which unfortunately were intercepted."

La Vallière hung down her head. "Really you overwhelm me," she said.

"I?"

"Yes, you torture me with your jests."

"Listen to me, Louise. These are no jests, for nothing is more serious; on the contrary, I did not drag you out

of the château ; I did not miss attending mass ; I did not pretend to have a cold, as Madame did, which she has no more than I have ; and, lastly, I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin, and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that when, at last, we were alone, with no one to listen to us, you should deal hypocritically with me. No, no ; believe me, that when I ask you a question, it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known,—it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, and according to his own fancy ; you had the honor last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear Louise ; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you, would make Mademoiselle de Scudery and her brother burst from very spite, if they were faithfully reported.”

“ But, dearest Montalais,” said the poor girl, “ you know better than any one exactly what I said, since you were present when I said it.”

“ Yes, I know. But that is not the question. I have not forgotten a single syllable you uttered, but did you think what you were saying ?”

Louise became confused. “ What,” she exclaimed, “ more questions still ! Oh, heavens ! when I would give the world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every one does all he possibly can to remind me of it ? Oh, this is indeed terrible !”

“ What is ?”

“ To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is undoing me—is killing me.”

“ There, there, that will do,” said Montalais ; “ after

having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret ; I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way ; for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also ; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For, the fact is, that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room, and I was going there after the Manicamp and Malicorne colloquies terminated, when I learned, on my return, rather late, it is true, that Madame had sequestered her maids of honor, and that we were to sleep in her apartments, instead of our own. Moreover, Madame has shut up her maids of honor in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together, and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, to what extent Athenais and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us ?”

“ I do not clearly understand the question you have put,” said Louise, much agitated.

“ Hum ! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able, in the slightest degree, to evade them. Listen to me : *Do you love M. de Bragelonne ?* That is plain enough, is it not ?”

At this question, which fell like the first bombshell of a besieging army into a doomed town, Louise started. “ You ask me,” she exclaimed, “ if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood,—my brother almost ?”

“ No, no, no ! Again you evade me, or rather, you wish to escape me. I do not ask you if you love Raoul, your childhood’s friend,—your brother ; but I ask if you love the Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband ?”

"Good heavens! dear Montalais," said Louise, "how severe your tone is!"

"You deserve no indulgence,—I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you, so answer it."

"You certainly do not," said Louise, in a choking voice, "speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend."

"Well, do so."

"Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride, with respect to everything that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read into the bottom of my soul."

"That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not interrogate you as I have done; I should simply say,—'My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without fortune. M. de la Fère will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son's wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year; which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne; that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards, why—afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you will have a right to commit any piece of folly people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.' That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart."

"And I should have thanked you," stammered out Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether sound."

"Wait, wait. But immediately after having given you that advice, I should have added :—'Louise, it is very

dangerous to pass whole days with your head drooping, your hands unoccupied, your eyes restless and full of thought; it is dangerous to prefer the least frequented paths, and no longer to be amused with such diversions as gladden young girl's hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to scrawl with the point of your foot, as you do, upon the gravel, certain letters it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L. than the letter B; and, lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and heart-ache; these fancies, while they sink into a young girl's mind, make her cheeks sink in also, so that it is not unusual, on such occasions, to find the most delightful persons in the world become the most disagreeable, and the wittiest to become the dullest.' "

"I thank you, dearest Aure," replied La Vallière, gently; "it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it."

"It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I have just described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself except such as you think you deserve. Stay, I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melancholy girl, who was gradually pining away because she fancied that the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whoever it was—and it does not much matter which—had fallen in love with her; while on the contrary, the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and—a singular circumstance, one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough—made use of her as a screen for his own love affair. You laugh as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, Louise?"

"I?—oh! of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me, and so I remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine, then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in anybody's brain,—a melancholy, I mean, of that kind. For my own part, I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to either of *us*, it would be most essential to be assured of its truth; to-day it is a snare, to-morrow it would become a jest and mockery, the next day it would mean death itself." La Vallière started again, and became, if possible, still paler.

"Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough, and, if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that, in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger as the one in question, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" said La Vallière; "some one approaches."

"Some one is approaching, in fact," said Montalais; "but who can it possibly be? Everybody is away, either at mass with the king, or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble stature of a young man, who, with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a gentle smile. "Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

"A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion," said Montalais.

"Oh! Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," exclaimed La Vallière, "after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy." These words, uttered with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony, if not from Montalais's heart, at least from her face.

"Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, Monsieur de Bragelonne," she cried to Raoul, "and armed and booted like him."

"A thousand compliments, young ladies," replied Raoul, bowing.

"But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?" repeated Montalais, whilst La Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.

"Why?" inquired Raoul.

"Yes!" ventured Louise.

"Because I am about to set off," said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

"The young girl seemed as though smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. "You are going away, Raoul!" she cried; "and where are you going?"

"Dearest Louise," he replied, with that quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, "I am going to England."

"What are you going to do in England?"

"The king has sent me there."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both. Raoul intercepted the glance, but could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest both the young girls took in him.

"His Majesty," he said, "has been good enough to remember that the Comte de la Fère is high in favor with King Charles II. This morning, as he was on his way to

attend mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. 'Monsieur de Bragelonne,' he said to me, 'you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the king of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of them.' I bowed. 'Ah!' His Majesty added, 'before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.'

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

"So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!" said Montalais, almost paralyzed by this unforeseen event.

"Properly to obey those whom we respect," said Raoul, "it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed, is writing the letter which she is good enough to do me the honor of intrusting to me. In the meantime, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in this direction, I came here, and am happy to find you both."

"And both of us very sad, as you see," said Montalais, going to Louise's assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.

"Suffering?" responded Raoul, pressing Louise's hand with a tender curiosity. "Your hand is like ice."

"It is nothing."

"This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?" inquired the young man, with a tender smile. Louise raised her head hastily, as if this question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse.

"Oh! you know," she said, with an effort, "that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your

mind; it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I reserve my life for you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?"

"Speak, Monsieur Raoul," said Louise, trembling painfully, "I am listening."

"I cannot part from you, carrying away with me a thought that tortures me; absurd I know it to be, and yet one which rends my very heart."

"Are you going away, then, for any length of time?" inquired La Vallière, with faltering utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.

"No; probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight." La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it was breaking.

"It is strange," pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression; "I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joyously enough—my heart free, my mind intoxicated by thoughts of happiness in store for me, hopes of which the future was full; and yet I was about to face the Spanish cannon, or the halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness, and by the sunniest path in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king's favor seems to indicate, for I am, perhaps, going to win *you*, Louise. What other favor, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth I know not how or why, but this happiness and this future seem to vanish before my very eyes like mist—like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection I cannot overcome—something heavy, passionless, death-like,—resem-

bling a corpse. Oh ! Louise, too well do I know why ; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. God help me ! ”

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais's arms. The latter, although she was not easily moved, felt the tears rush to her eyes. Raoul noted only the tears Louise shed ; his look, however, did not penetrate—nay, sought not to penetrate—beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand ; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart.

“ Rise, rise,” said Montalais to him, ready to cry, “ for Athenaïs is coming.”

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and, having pressed Montalais's hand gratefully, he turned round to salute Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Char-ente, the sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel walk. “ Has Madame finished her letter ? ” he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.

“ Yes, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal highness is ready to receive you.”

Raoul, at this remark, hardly gave himself time to salute Athenaïs, cast one last look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the château. As he withdrew he again turned round, but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls, on their side, had, with widely different feelings, watched him disappear.

“ At last,” said Athenaïs, the first to interrupt the silence, “ at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday's great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it

is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me," she continued, looking round on all sides, "I will explain to you, as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I imagine it to be, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame's desire on the subject. And Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone, as to leave no doubt, in her companion's minds, upon the official character with which she was invested.

"Madame's desire!" exclaimed Montalais and La Vallière together.

"Her *ultimatum*," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

"But," murmured La Vallière, "does Madame know, then——"

"Madame knows more about the matter than we said, even," said Athenais, in a formal, precise manner. "Therefore, let us come to a proper understanding."

"Yes, indeed," said Montalais, "and I am listening in breathless attention."

"Gracious Heavens!" murmured Louise, trembling, "shall I ever survive this cruel evening?"

"Oh! do not frighten yourself in that manner," said Athenais; "we have found a remedy. So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoken, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public high-road, outside the gates of the château.

CHAPTER XX.

HAPPY AS A PRINCE.

At the very moment he was about entering the château, Bragelonne met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, answered that every pocket, which is always being drawn upon without anything ever being put in it, resembles those wells which supply water during the winter, but which gardeners render useless by exhausting during the summer; that his, Malicorne's, pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that, unhappily, abuse had produced barrenness. To this remark, Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, "Quite true!"

"The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne added.

"Of course; but in what way?"

"Nothing easier, my dear Monsieur Manicamp."

"So much the better. How?"

"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."

"You have the post?"

"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."

"Well!"

"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is like a purse with no money in it."

"Quite true," Manicamp replied a second time.

"Let us try for the post, then," the candidate had persisted.

"My dear fellow," sighed Manicamp, "an appointment in his royal highness's household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position."

"Oh! oh!"

"There is no question that, at the present moment, we cannot ask Monsieur for anything."

"Why so?"

"Because we are not on good terms with him."

"A great absurdity, too," said Malicorne, promptly.

"Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention," said Manicamp, "frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?"

"Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do it adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us."

"Hum!"

"Either that or we are great fools. Make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, and make M. de Guiche and his royal highness friendly again."

"Tell me, what did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?"

"Tell me? nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all."

"Well, he was less discreet, then, with me."

"What did he tell you?"

"That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"We knew that already," replied Malicorne, ironically;

and everybody talks about it loud enough for all to know it; but in the meantime, do what I advise you; speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavor to get him to make advances to Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal highness that, at least."

"But we must see De Guiche, then?"

"There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that; try to see him in the same way I tried to see you; wait for him; you know that he is naturally very fond of walking."

"Yes; but whereabouts does he walk?"

"What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the château where her apartments are."

"Stay, my dear Malicorne, you were not mistaken, for here he is coming."

"Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making a mistake? Come, we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

"Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp, shall have the money. There is no greater difficulty in the way than that."

"Very well; in that case make yourself easy. I will do my best."

"Do."

De Guiche approached, Malicorne stepped aside, and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thoughtful and melancholy. "Tell me, my dear comte, what rhyme you were trying to find," said Manicamp. "I have an excellent one to match yours, particularly if yours ends in *âme*."

De Guiche shook his head, and recognizing a friend, he took him by the arm. "My dear Manicamp," he said, "I am in search of something very different from a rhyme."

"What is it you are looking for?"

"You will help me to find what I am in search of," continued the comte: "you who are such an idle fellow, in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices?"

"I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear comte."

"This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have some business."

"You must get near the house, then," said Manicamp.

"Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous."

"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"

"Not more, but quite as much so."

"Has he three mouths, as that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions had? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear comte: I put the question to you with an excellent reason, since poets pretend that, in order to soften Monsieur Cerberus, the visitor must take something enticing with him—a cake, for instance. Therefore, I, who view the matter in a prosaic light, that is to say, in the light of reality, I say: one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, comte, get three cakes."

"Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. de Beautru."

"In order to get better advice," said Manicamp, with a comical seriousness of expression, "you will be obliged to adopt a more precise formula than you have used towards me."

"If Raoul were here," said De Guiche, "he would be sure to understand me."

"So I think, particularly if you said to him: 'I should very much like to see Madame, a little nearer, but I fear Monsieur, because he is jealous.'"

"Manicamp!" cried the comte, angrily, and endeavoring to overwhelm his tormentor by a look, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.

"What is the matter now, my dear comte?" inquired Manicamp.

"What! is it thus that you blaspheme the most sacred of names?"

"What names?"

"Monsieur! Madame! the highest names in the kingdom."

"You are very strangely mistaken, my dear comte. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who as a matter of course, has a wife. I therefore replied to you, in order to see Madame, you must get a little more intimate with Monsieur."

"Double-dealer, that you are," said the comte, smiling; "was that what you said?"

"Nothing else."

"Very good; what then?"

"Now," added Manicamp, "let the question be regarding the Duchess—or the Duke——; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house in some way or other, for that is a tactic which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love-affair."

"Ah! Manicamp, if you could but find me a pretext, a good pretext."

"A pretext; I can find you a hundred, nay, a thousand. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon a thousand excellent pretexts."

"Who is Malicorne?" replied De Guiche, half-shutting his eyes like a person reflecting, "I seem to know the name."

"Know him! I should think so: you owe his father thirty thousand crowns."

"Ah, indeed! so it's that worthy fellow from Orleans."

"Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur's household; not the jealous husband, but the other."

"Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is such an inventive genius, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him."

"Very good: I'll talk to him about it."

"But who is that coming?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Raoul! yes, it is he," said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet him. "You here, Raoul?" said De Guiche.

"Yes: I was looking for you, to say farewell," replied Raoul, warmly, pressing the comte's hand. "How do you do, Monsieur Manicamp?"

"How is this, vicomte, you are leaving us?"

"Yes, a mission from the king."

"Where are you going?"

"To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame; she has a letter to give me for his majesty Charles II."

"You will find her alone, for Monsieur has gone out; gone to bathe, in fact."

"In that case, you, who are one of Monsieur's gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I would have waited in order to receive any directions he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his majesty."

Manicamp touched De Guiche's elbow, saying, "There's a pretext for you."

"What?"

"M. de Bragelonne's excuses."

"A weak pretext," said De Guiche.

"An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you ; but a paltry one if he bears you ill-will."

"You are right, Manicamp ; a pretext, however poor it may be, is all I require. And so, a pleasant journey to you, Raoul !" And the two friends took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame's apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was still burning the rose-colored taper she had used to seal it. Only in her deep reflection, for Madame seemed to be buried in thought, she had forgotten to extinguish the light. Bragelonne was a very model of elegance in every way ; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him ; and, not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Havre to Paris. Madame preserved therefore an excellent recollection of him.

"Ah! M. de Bragelonne," she said to him, "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he contracted with the father."

"The Comte de la Fère, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness manifested towards him, and it is I who will have to convey to his majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of both father and son."

"Do you know my brother?"

"No, your highness ; I shall have the honor of seeing his majesty for the first time."

"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."

Your royal highness overwhelms me with kindness."

"No ! M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travelers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, on both sides, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world, — M de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however ; but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently ? Forgive my inquiry : it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything I can."

"No, madame ; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his majesty has been kind enough to confide to me — nothing more."

"And you propose to return to France ?"

"As soon as I have accomplished my mission ; unless, indeed, his majesty King Charles II. should have other orders for me."

"He will beg you, at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible."

"In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal highness to have the goodness to remind the King of France that one of his devoted servants is far away from him."

"Take care that when you *are* recalled, you do not consider his command as an abuse of power."

"I do not understand you, madame."

"The court of France is not easily matched, I am aware, but yet we have some pretty women at the court of England also."

Raoul smiled.

"Oh!" said Madame, "yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen. It is as though you were telling them, Monsieur de Bragelonne: 'I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.' Did not your smile indicate that?"

"Your highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why, at present, any prolonged residence at the court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret."

"And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?"

"I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe our affection is mutual."

"In that case, do not delay your departure, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope no obstacle exists to your felicity."

"There is a great obstacle, madame."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The king's wishes on the subject."

"The king opposes your marriage?"

"He postpones it, at least. I solicited His Majesty's consent through the Comte de la Fère, and, without absolutely refusing it, he positively said it must be deferred."

"Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?"

"She is worthy of a king's affection, madame."

"I mean, she is not, perhaps, of birth equal to your own."

"Her family is excellent."

"Is she young, beautiful?"

"She is seventeen, and, in my opinion, exceedingly beautiful."

"Is she in the country, or at Paris?"

"She is here at Fontainebleau, madame."

"At the court?"

"Yes."

"Do I know her?"

"She has the honor to form one of your highness's household."

"Her name?" inquired the princess, anxiously; "if indeed," she added hastily, "her name is not a secret?"

"No, madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one, and with still greater reason to your royal highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière."

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which a feeling stronger than surprise might have been detected. "Ah!" she said, "La Vallière—she who yesterday——" she paused and then continued, "she who was taken ill, I believe."

"Yes, madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident that had befallen her."

"Did you see her before you came to me?"

"I had the honor of taking leave of her."

"And you say," resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, "that the king has—deferred your marriage with this young girl."

"Yes, madame, deferred it."

"Did he assign any reason for this postponement?"

"None."

"How long is it since the Comte de la Fère preferred his request to the king?"

"More than a month, madame."

"It is very singular," said the princess, as something like a film clouded her eyes.

"A month?" she repeated.

"About a month."

"You are right, vicomte," said the princess, with a smile, in which De Bragelonne might have remarked a

kind of restraint, "my brother must not keep you too long in England; set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England, I will claim you in the king's name." And Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne's hands. Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed lowly to the princess, and left the room.

"A month!" murmured the princess; "could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?" And as Madame had nothing to do, she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be led to the stables, where they desired their horses to be got ready for them; then, by one of the side paths, a description of which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who, having just finished bathing, was returning towards the château, wearing a woman's veil to protect his face from getting burnt by the sun, which was shining very brightly. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor to which the admiration of his own good looks sometimes gave occasion. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of his courtiers, and, thanks to the care which his royal highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, was able to stand the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been exercised by the healthy immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body. So that, at the sight of Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"I think matters look well," said Manicamp, who

fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal highness's countenance.

"Good-day, De Guiche, good-day," exclaimed the prince.

"Long life to your royal highness!" replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip's voice; "health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your highness."

"Welcome, De Guiche, come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace under the cool shade of these trees."

"As you please, monseigneur," said De Guiche, taking his place on the prince's right as he had been invited to do.

"Now, my dear De Guiche," said the prince, "give me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife."

Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes, while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark, and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing scarlet, put a good countenance on the matter; Manicamp looked at him.

"Ah! monseigneur," replied De Guiche, "show a little charity towards such a miserable fellow as I am; do not hold me up to the ridicule of the Chevalier de Lorraine."

"How do you mean?"

"If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your highness, and will show no pity."

"About your passion and the princess, do you mean?"

"For mercy's sake, monseigneur."

"Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you *did* get a little sweet upon Madame."

"I will never confess such a thing, monseigneur."

"Out of respect for me, I suppose; but I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again. "Come, that wasn't at all bad!—a remark like a sword, which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time, Chalais and La Vallière, your affianced bride and his future lady-love."

"Really, monseigneur," said the comte, "you are in a most brilliant humor to-day."

"The fact is, I feel well, and then I am pleased to see you again. But you were angry with me, were you not?"

"I, monseigneur? Why should I have been so?"

"Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it. On that day you left the princess's apartments with your eyes full of fury; that brought you ill-luck, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most wretched manner. Now don't get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look like a tame bear. If the princess did look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing."

"What is that, monseigneur? Your highness alarms me."

"She has quite forsworn you now," said the prince, with a burst of loud laughter.

"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike."

The prince continued: "At all events, you have now returned, and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again."

"How so, monseigneur: and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?"

"The matter is very simple, he is jealous of you."

"Bah! it is not possible."

"It is the case, though."

"He does me too much honor."

"The fact is, that when you are here, he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martyrdom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea that has struck me?"

"I do not even suspect it."

"Well, then; when you were in exile, for you really were exiled, my poor De Guiche——"

"I should think so, indeed; but whose fault was it?" said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.

"Not mine, certainly, my dear comte," replied his royal highness, "upon my honor, I did not ask the king to exile you——"

"No, not you, monseigneur, I am well aware; but——"

"But Madame; well, as far as that goes, I do not say it was not the case. Why, what the deuce did you do or say to Madame?"

"Really, monseigneur——"

"Women, I know, have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled I bear you no ill-will."

"In that case, monseigneur," said De Guiche. "I am not altogether unhappy."

Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche, and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse's neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

"Besides, your exile started a project in my head."

"Good."

"When the chevalier—finding you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed—began to bully

me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to him, was most kind and amiable towards me who had neglected her so much, the idea occurred to me of becoming a model husband—a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife.”

De Guiche looked at the prince with a stupefied expression of countenance, which was not assumed.

“Oh! monseigneur,” De Guiche stammered out; “surely, that never seriously occurred to you.”

“Indeed it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage; she has some money of her own, and not a little either, for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law of England and France at the same time. Well! we should have left the court. I should have retired to my château at Villers-Cotterets, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., sojourned with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche!”

“Why, it is enough to make one shiver, monseigneur,” replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

“Ah! I see you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time.”

“I, monseigneur?”

“I will not carry you off with us, as I had at first intended.”

“What, with you, monseigneur?”

“Yes; if the idea should occur to me again of taking a dislike to the court.”

“Oh! do not let that make any difference, monseigneur; I would follow your highness to the end of the world.”

“Clumsy fellow, that you are!” said Manicamp, grumblingly, pushing his horse towards De Guiche, so as al-

most to unseat him, and then, as he passed close to him as if he had lost command over the horse, he whispered, "For goodness' sake, think what you are saying."

"Well, it is agreed, then," said the prince; "since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me."

"Anywhere, monseigneur," replied De Guiche in a joyous tone, "whenever you like, and at once, too. Are you ready?"

And De Guiche, laughingly, gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

"One moment," said the prince. "Let us go to the château first."

"What for?"

"Why, to take my wife, of course."

"What for?" asked De Guiche.

"Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary I should take my wife with me."

"In that case, monseigneur," replied the comte, "I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you."

"Bah!"

"Yes.—Why do you take Madame with you?"

"Because I begin to fancy I love her," said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavored to preserve his seeming cheerfulness.

"If you love Madame, monseigneur," he said, "that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends."

"Not bad, not bad," murmured Manicamp.

"There, your fear of Madame has begun again," replied the prince.

"Why, monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost; a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!"

"What a revengeful disposition you have, De Guiche, how virulently you bear malice."

"I should like the case to be your own, monseigneur."

"Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in her dancing; ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it."

"You may tell her whatever you please, monseigneur, for Her Highness cannot hate me more than she does."

"Nonsense, you are exaggerating; and this because merely of the fortnight's sojourn in the country she imposed on you."

"Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight; and when the time is passed in getting sick and tired of everything, a fortnight is an eternity."

"So that you will not forgive her?"

"Never!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, be a better disposed fellow than that. I wish to make your peace with her; you will find, in conversing with her, that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is very talented."

"Monseigneur——"

"You will see, that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen's wife; you will see that, when she pleases, she can make the pleasant hours pass like minutes. Come, De Guiche, you must really make up your differences with my wife."

"Upon my word," said Manicamp to himself, "the prince is a husband whose wife's name will bring him ill-luck, and King Candaules, of old, was a tiger beside his royal highness."

"At all events," added the prince, "I am sure you will make it up with my wife: I guarantee you will do so. Only, I must show you the way now. There is nothing commonplace about her: it is not every one who takes her fancy."

"Monseigneur——"

"No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper," replied the prince.

"Well, since he will have it so," murmured Manicamp, in Guiche's ear, "do as he wants you to do."

"Well, monseigneur," said the comte, "I obey."

"And to begin," resumed the prince, "there will be cards, this evening, in Madame's apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me."

"Oh! as for that, monseigneur," objected De Guiche, "you will allow me to object."

"What, again! this is positive rebellion."

"Madame received me too indifferently, yesterday, before the whole court."

"Really!" said the prince, laughing.

"Nay, so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her; it may be a good thing to have no self-respect at all, but to have too little is not enough, as the saying is."

"Comte! after dinner, you will go to your own apartments, and dress yourself, and then you will come to fetch me. I shall wait for you."

"Since your highness absolutely commands it."

"Positively."

"He will not loose his hold," said Manicamp; "these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah! what a pity M. Molière could not have heard this man; he would have turned him into verse if he had."

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the château.

"By the by," said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, "I had a commission for your Royal Highness."

"Execute it, then."

"M. de Bragelonne has, by the king's order, set off for

London, and he charged me with his respects for you, monseigneur."

"A pleasant journey to the vicomte, whom I like very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don't come back——"

"What will happen, monseigneur?"

"I will have you sent to the Bastile."

"Well," said De Guiche, laughing, "his royal highness, Monseigneur, is decidedly the counterpart of Her royal highness, Madame. Madame gets me sent into exile, because she does not care for me sufficiently; and Monseigneur gets me imprisoned, because he cares for me too much. I thank Monseigneur, and I thank Madame."

"Come, come," said the prince, "you are a delightful companion, and you know I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can."

"Very well; but I am in the humor to prove myself difficult to be pleased, in *my* turn, monseigneur."

"Bah!"

"So, I will not return to your royal highness, except upon one condition."

"Name it."

"I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends."

"What's his name?"

"Malicorne."

"An ugly name."

"But very well borne, monseigneur."

"That may be. Well?"

"Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, monseigneur."

"What kind of a place?"

"Any kind of place; a supervision of some sort or another, for instance."

"That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my chief usher of the apartments."

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"That will do admirably. What are his duties?"

"Nothing, except to look about and make his report."

"A sort of interior police?"

"Exactly."

"Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne," Manicamp ventured to say.

"You know the person we are speaking of, M. Manicamp?" inquired the prince.

"Intimately, monseigneur. He is a friend of mine."

"And your opinion is?"

"That your highness could never get a better usher of the apartments than he will make."

"How much does the appointment bring in?" inquired the comte of the prince.

"I don't know at all, only I have always been told that he could make as much as he pleased when he was thoroughly in earnest."

"What do you call being thoroughly in earnest, prince?"

"It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man who has his wits about him."

"In that case I think your highness will be content, for Malicorne is as sharp as the devil himself."

"Good! the appointment will be an expensive one for me, in that case," replied the prince, laughing. "You are making me a positive present, comte."

"I believe so, monseigneur."

"Well, go and announce to your M. Mélicorne——"

"Malicorne, monseigneur."

"I shall never get hold of that name."

"You say Manicamp very well, monseigneur."

"Oh, I ought to say Malicorne very well, too. The alliteration will help me."

"Say what you like, monseigneur, I can promise you your *inspector* of apartments will not be annoyed; he has the very happiest disposition that can be met with."

"Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay——"

"What is it, monseigneur?"

"I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract every word I have said."

"Your highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais-Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you."

"Ah, I remember now—not a bad-looking fellow."

"I know you must have noticed him, monseigneur."

"Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honor pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see, that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty, if my wife and myself have handsome models before us."

"Most magnificently argued, monseigneur," said Manicamp showing his approval by look and voice at the same time.

As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing, for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which, moreover, exhibited in a marked manner some indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of dressing himself. Monsieur, singing, laughing and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour, in a frame of mind that justified the proverb of "Happy as a prince."

CHAPTER XXI.

STORY OF A DRYAD AND A NAIAD.

EVERY one had partaken of the banquet at the château, and afterwards assumed their full court dresses. The usual hour for the repast was five o'clock. If we say, then, that the repast occupied an hour, and the toilette two hours, everybody was ready about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's, for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. And at Madame's *soirées* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments had always that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her *réunions*. For, unfortunately, one of the advantages of goodness of disposition is that it is far less amusing than wit of an ill-natured character. And yet, let us hasten to add, that such a style of wit could not be assigned to Madame, for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and high-souled thoughts to warrant her being termed ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance—a gift frequently fatal to its possessor, for it breaks where another disposition would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the cotton-wadded feelings of Maria-Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack, and therefore, whenever she was attacked, even in a manner that almost stunned her, she

returned blow for blow to any one imprudent enough to tilt against her.

Was this really maliciousness of disposition or simply waywardness of character? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time; a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, of which those who wish to eat know how to detect the good fruit, and from which the worthless and frivolous die who have eaten of it—a circumstance which is by no means to be regarded as a great misfortune. Madame, therefore, who had a well-digested plan in her mind of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal, queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, from the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty she allowed every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was amusing or sensible. And it will hardly be believed, that, by that means, there was less talking among the society Madame assembled together than elsewhere. Madame hated people who talked much, and took a remarkably cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. It was more than a weakness of Monsieur, and the princess had undertaken the amazing task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves. Sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humors to make even poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons who were present, to be listened to with pleasure—it will easily be believed that the *réunions* held in Madame's apartment must naturally have proved very attractive. All who were young flocked there, and when the king

himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so too. And so, the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency, or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others only laughed at the fits of sulkiness in which these venerable individuals indulged, who had carried the love of authority so far as even to take command of bodies of soldiers in the wars of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether. As eight o'clock struck her royal highness entered the great drawing-room, accompanied by her ladies in attendance, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked round for the one who, she thought, ought to have been first in attendance, but he was not there. However, almost at the very moment she completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced. Monsieur looked splendid. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels as well as a few belonging to his wife—Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the rising sun. Behind him followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps and an air of contrition admirably assumed; De Guiche wore a costume of French-gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons: he wore also Mechlin lace, as rare and beautiful in its own way as the jewels of Monsieur in theirs. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colors, and preferred red for embroidery, gray for dress, and blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. An interesting pallor of complexion, a languid expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace that covered them, the melan-

choly expression of his mouth—it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the court of France could hope to equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy he could eclipse a star even, if a star had adorned itself in a similar manner to himself, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in all imaginations, which are silent judges certainly, but very positive and firm in their convictions. Madame looked at De Guiche lightly, but light as her look had been, it brought a delightful color to his face. In fact, Madame found De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed, that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest she felt was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, sent the blood to her face. Monsieur approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush, or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause.

"Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here, who has fallen into disgrace, an unhappy exile whom I venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that a gentle reception of him will please me greatly."

"What exile? what disgraced person are you speaking of?" inquired Madame, looking all round, and not permitting her glance to rest more on the count than on the others.

This was the moment to present De Guiche, and the prince drew aside and let De Guiche pass him, who, with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner, approached Madame and made his reverence to her.

"What!" exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised, "is M. de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, the exile in question?"

"Yes, certainly," returned the duke.

"Indeed," said Madame, "he seems almost the only person here!"

"You are unjust, Madame," said the prince.

"I?"

"Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow."

"Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?"

"Come, explain yourself, De Guiche. What do you wish to be forgiven?" inquired the prince.

"Alas! her royal highness knows very well what it is," replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

"Come, come, give him your hand, Madame," said Philip.

"If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur," and, with a movement of her eyes and shoulders, which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended towards the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips. It was evident that he did so for some little time, and that Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly, for the duke added:—

"De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; so do not be afraid, he will not bite you."

A pretext was given in the gallery by the duke's remark, which was not perhaps, very laughable, for every one to laugh excessively. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it. Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced. The appearance of the room at that moment was as follows:—in the center, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing up, with her maids of honor formed in two wings, on either side of her; around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups were formed in the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same

garrison. From their respective places they could pick up the remarks which fell from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once raised to the dignity, through Manicamp and De Guiche, of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame's extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and splendor of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Chatillon and Mademoiselle de Créquy, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was on Madame's left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed as certain bodies of troops are, whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Guarded in this manner by the companions who had shared her adventure, La Vallière, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events, which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers, La Vallière, we repeat, hid her eyes, red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenaïs, alternately, whispered to her from time to time. As soon as the king's name was announced a general movement took place in the apartment. Madame, in her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right; her glance, which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Vallière, whose warm blush and restless emotion it instantly perceived.

The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one, by a movement which took place from the circumference to the center. Every head bowed low before his majesty, the ladies bending like frail, magnificent lilies before king Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say, nothing very royal that evening about the king, except youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humor which set all imaginations at work, and, thereupon, all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than from having remarked the desire his majesty had to amuse himself in Madame's apartments. If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humor equaled the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-colored costume, with face and ribbons of the same color, and, in addition, particularly rose-colored in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in jests. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous ideas germinating in his fertile brain was, that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-color. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not known beforehand that the beautiful Athenais was to wear that particular color; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dressmaker or a ladies'-maid as to her mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenais as he had bows of ribbon on his stockings and doublet; in other words, he discharged a prodigious number. The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies present while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged

turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Valvins, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been intrusted with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were actually true—at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him at more leisure; Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes devouringly on Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This undaunted maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic warmth of feeling this gaze might possibly have conveyed. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries, and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she did. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and, with the view of effecting this, he redoubled his attention and devotion to her. Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and, determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying :

“Sire, your majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your majesty kindly communicate them to us?”

“Madame,” replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, “I dare not—you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details—but Saint-Aignan tells a story well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses. If he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify he is almost a poet himself.” Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as pos-

sible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time, at the beautiful Athenais, who carried into practice her previous evening's theory of not even deigning to look at her adorer, he said:—

“Your majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, how could I possibly remember?”

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favorably.

“Ah! madame,” added Saint-Aignan, “at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon earth madame, important events happen. Ah! madame, upon the earth, how many tales are there full of——”

“Well,” said Madame, “and what is taking place upon the earth?”

“That question must be asked of the Dryads,” replied the comte; “the Dryads inhabit the forest, as your royal highness is aware.”

“I am aware, also, that they are naturally very talkative, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan.”

“Such is the case, madame; but when they say such delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative.”

“Do they talk so delightfully, then?” inquired the princess, indifferently. “Really, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and, if I were the king

I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are these Dryads have been saying since you alone seem to understand their language."

"I am at his majesty's orders, madame, in that respect," replied the comte, quickly.

"What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is to understand the language of the Dryads," said Monsieur.

"I understand it perfectly, monseigneur, as I do my own language."

"Tell us all about them, then," said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed, for his confidant was, in all probability, about to embark in a difficult matter. He felt that it would be so, from the general attention excited by Saint-Aignan's preamble, and aroused too by Madame's peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the comte was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at some of the maids of honor, who, in order to support with greater propriety, or with more steadiness, the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them, adjusted their fans accordingly, and assumed the bearing of a duelist about to be exposed to his adversary's fire. At this epoch, the fashion of ingeniously-constructed conversations, and hazardously-dangerous recitals, so prevailed, that, where, in modern times, a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal, or disclosure, or tragic event, and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by Monsieur de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, and the termination of which, whatever the style and the plot might be, must, as a matter of course, be marked by the most perfect propriety. The comte was known as a man of extreme refinement, and an admirable narrator. He courageously

began, then, amidst a profound silence, which would have been formidable to any one but himself :—"Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honor, therefore, to inform your royal highness that the Dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and, as Dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees, in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled, under a transparent veil, the celebrated story of the royal oak, which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from joy and uneasiness, that, if Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice.

"There must surely be Dryads at Fontainebleau, then," said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never, in all my life, seen finer oaks than in the royal park." And as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the one that preceded it; which, as we have already mentioned, had reserved a certain amount of indefiniteness most painful for so loving a heart as his.

"Precisely, madame, it is of Fontainebleau I was about to speak to your royal highness," said Saint-Aignan; "for the Dryad whose story is engaging our attention, lives in the park belonging to the château of his majesty."

The affair was fairly embarked on; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for auditory or narrator to draw back.

"It will be worth listening to," said Madame; "for the story not only appears to me to have all the interest of a

national incident, but still more, seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence."

"I ought to begin at the beginning," said the comte. "In the first place, then, there lived at Fontainebleau, in a cottage of modest and unassuming appearance, two shepherds. The one was the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents, by right of inheritance. Tyrcis was young and handsome, and, from his many qualifications, he might be pronounced to be the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might even boldly say he was the king of shepherds." A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued:—"His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse in the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shepherds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars hurling his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it was Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand." Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium the narrator could have chosen; and, consequently it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon those who, from duty or inclination, applauded it to the very echo, or on the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately conveyed, and whom, indeed, it did not always displease, even when it was a little too broad. Saint-Aignan then continued:—"It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis had acquired that reputation by which he was regarded as the king of shepherds."

"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smilingly, to Madame.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, "Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world." The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

"It is," pursued Saint-Aignan, amidst a flattering murmur of applause, "it is with ladies fair especially that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet, that beautiful and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, never a moment's forgetfulness. Whoever has seen and heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness." Saint-Aignan here paused; he was enjoying the pleasure of all these compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favor in certain ears, in which the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated. Madame begged the orator to continue. "Tyrcis," said the comte, "had a faithful companion, or rather a devoted servant, whose name was—Amyntas."

"Ah!" said Madame, archly, "now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan."

"Madame——"

"Oh! comte, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas; I should never forgive you."

"Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honored by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those

followers of ancient times, who caused themselves to be buried alive at their masters' feet. Amyntas's place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis; he cares for no other; and if, sometimes, the illustrious hero——"

"Illustrious shepherd, you mean?" said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal highness is right; I was mistaken," returned the courtier; "if, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend, and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favor, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity."

"All that you say," interrupted Madame, "establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Comte, do not flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas's portrait." Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly towards his majesty's sister-in-law.

"Amyntas," he said, "is somewhat older than Tyrcis; he is not an ill-favored shepherd; it is even said that the muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious of display, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not, perhaps, be found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well-known."

This latter paragraph, strengthened by a killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who received them both unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect; Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed on him: Tyrcis's head even gave the signal for it by a consenting bow, full of good feeling.

"One evening," continued Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that

the story of the Dryad is now beginning, otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They reached the thickest part of the forest, for the purpose of being quite alone, and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting."

At this point, Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who could not help wincing as they drew themselves up.

"These harmonious voices, resumed Saint-Aignan, "were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves there to interchange their ideas upon——" A loud burst of laughter occasioned by this remark of Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king, as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally.

"The Dryad affirms positively," continued Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all three were young and beautiful."

"What were their names?" said Madame, quietly.

"Their names?" said Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course; you called your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."

"Oh! Madame, I am not an inventor; I relate simply what took place as the Dryad related it to me."

"What did your Dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This Dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

"These shepherdesses, Madame? Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman's name."

"From which a woman absolves you, comte, on condition that you will reveal the names of the shepherdesses."

"Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea."

"Exceedingly well!—they have not lost by the delay," said Madame, "and now we have three charming names. But now for their portraits."

Saint-Aignan again made a slight movement.

"Nay, comte, let us proceed in due order," returned Madame. "Ought we not, sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?"

The king, who expected this determined perseverance, and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that Saint-Aignan, in drawing the portraits, would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one his majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and with this fear that Louis authorized Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses, Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.

"Very well, then; be it so," said Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind, and he began.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD.

"PHYLLIS," said Saint-Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on guard, "Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor

short, neither too grave or too gay ; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess, and as coquettish as the most finished flirt that ever lived. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything her gaze embraces. She is like a bird, which, always warbling, at one moment skims the ground, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then rests itself upon the topmost branch of a tree where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entrap it in their nets." The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais, that all eyes were directed towards her ; she, however, with her head raised, and with a steady, unmoved look, listened to Saint-Aignan, as if he were speaking of an utter stranger.

"Is that all, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan ?" inquired the princess.

"Oh ! your royal highness, the portrait is a mere sketch, and many more additions could be made, but I fear to weary your patience, or offend the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis."

"Very well," said Madame, "pass on to Amaryllis, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, we are all attention."

"Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet," Saint-Aignan hastened to add, "this advanced age does not reach twenty years."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the commencement of the description, unbent them with a smile.

"She is tall, with an astonishing abundance of beautiful hair, which she fastens in the manner of the Grecian statues ; her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty ; she has the air, therefore, rather of a goddess than a mere mortal, and among the goddesses, she most resembles Diana the huntress ; with this sole difference, however,

that the cruel shepherdess, having stolen the quiver of young love, while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the inhabitants of the forest, discharges them pitilessly against all poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow and of her eyes."

"Oh! what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."

"It is the hope of shepherds, one and all!" said Saint-Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," said Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause greeted this profession of faith on behalf of the shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skillful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," said Saint-Aignan, "I am indeed a poor dumb post beside the mighty Virgil. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best."

Saint-Aignan extended his foot and hand, and thus began:—"White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with a tender passion as she played with her companions in the flower-spangled meadows. From her exquisite eyes, blue as azure heaven on the clearest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie nurtures, and love dispenses.

When she frowns, or bends her looks toward the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, nature resumes her jollity, and the birds, for a brief moment silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea," said Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the admiration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that man be to whom she consecrates her first affections."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait Saint-Aignan had drawn, as, indeed, had all the others, contented herself with accentuating her approbation of the most poetic passage by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say if these marks of assent were accorded to the ability of the narrator or the resemblance of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was, that as Madame did not openly exhibit any approbation, no one felt authorized to applaud, not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses, and had somewhat slightly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his palate of artistic tints in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favor with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loudest applause allotted to this last one, was himself more disappointed than the king and rest of the company. A moment's silence followed, which was last broken by Madame.

"Well, sir," she inquired, "what is your majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."

"For my part," said Monsieur, "I prefer Phyllis; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph."

A gentle laugh followed, and this time the looks were so direct, that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

"Well," resumed Madame, "what were those shepherdesses saying to each other?"

Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, "Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences."

"Nay, nay! Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy," said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

"They confessed that love is a mighty peril, but that the absence of love is the heart's sentence of death."

"What was the conclusion they came to?" inquired Madame.

"They came to the conclusion that love was necessary."

"Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?"

"That of choice, simply," said Saint-Aignan. "I ought even to add,—remember it is the Dryad who is speaking,—that one of the shepherdesses, Amaryllis, I believe, was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to take refuge in her heart."

"Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?"

"Amyntas, Madame," said Saint-Aignan, modestly. "But Galatea, the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea, immediately replied, that neither Amyntas, nor Alpheusibœus, nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis

was as superior to all other men, as the oak to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She drew even such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered at it, notwithstanding his rank as a shepherd. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had been distinguished by Phillis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts revealed beneath the shades of evening, and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, madame, is what the Dryad related to me; she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind among the branches, the humming of the insect with its gold and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers; it was she who related the particulars to me, and I have repeated them."

"And now you have finished, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile that made the king tremble.

"Quite finished," replied Saint-Aignan, "and but too happy if I have been able to amuse your royal highness for a few moments."

"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess, "for you have related most admirably all you know; but, my dear Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one Dryad only, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was, that you passed by a little Naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your Dryad, my dear comte."

"A Naiad!" repeated several voices, who began to suspect that the story had a continuation.

"Of course close beside the oak you are speaking of,

which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak—is it not so, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan?”

Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances.

“Yes, Madame,” the former replied.

“Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly over the pebbles between banks of forget-me-nots and daffodils.”

“I believe you are correct,” said the king, with some uneasiness, and listening with some anxiety to his sister-in-law’s narrative.

“Oh! there is one, I can assure you,” said Madame; “and the proof of it is, that the Naiad who resides in that little stream, stopped me as I was about to cross.”

“Ah?” said Saint-Aignan.

“Yes, indeed,” continued the princess, “and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars Monsieur de Saint-Aignan has omitted in his recital.”

“Pray relate them yourself,” said Monsieur, “you can relate stories in such a charming manner.” The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her.

“I do not possess the poetical powers of the comte, nor his ability to bring to light the smallest details.”

“You will not be listened to with less interest on that account,” said the king, who already perceived that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law’s story.

“I speak, too,” continued Madame, “in the name of that poor little Naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is the finest physic in the world, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words.”

The king and Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many of the faces present a distant and prophetic ripple

of the laughter Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking themselves whether there was not some little conspiracy concealed beneath these words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with an air of the most perfect candor, in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs:—"Well, then, I passed that way," she said, "and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me."

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. "My little Naiad," continued Madame, "was cooing out her quaint song in the bed of the rivulet; as I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my dress, I could not think of receiving her advances ungraciously, and more particularly so, since, after all, a divinity even though she be of a second grade, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the Naiad, and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me:

"'Fancy, princess . . . ?' You understand, sire, it is the Naiad who is speaking?"

The king bowed assentingly; and Madame continued:—"Fancy, princess, the banks of my little stream have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds, full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in a most amusing manner by three nymphs, or three shepherdesses,—I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it was nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue."

The king, at this opening, colored visibly, and Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety.

“‘The two shepherds,’ pursued my nymph, still laughing, ‘followed in the wake of the three young ladies,’—no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present, and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me.”

The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture.

“‘But,’ continued the Naiad, ‘the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and, by the light of the moon, they had recognized them through the grove of trees.’ Ah, you laugh!” interrupted Madame; “wait, wait, you are not yet at the end.”

The king turned pale; Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, now dewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies present could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers.

“‘The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and, when they perceived that their over-curious listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they might say could be lost, they addressed towards them very innocently, in the most artless manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as honey.’”

The king, at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed, under a silly laugh, the extreme annoyance he felt.

“Oh,” said the king, drawing himself up to his full

height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest certainly; but, really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the Naiads?"

"The comte, sire, pretends to have perfectly understood that of the Dryads," retorted Madame icily.

"No doubt," said the king; "but you know the comte has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy, so that, with this object in view, he has learnt all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the Nymph of the Waters might be among the number of things you have not studied."

"Of course, sire," replied Madame, "for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine; and I, therefore, wished to satisfy myself by other opinions besides my own, and as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, is polyglot,—is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"I believe so," said the latter, quite out of countenance.

"Well," continued the princess, "as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, had, at first, spoken to me in English, I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her, and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente and de La Vallière, to come to me, begging my Naiad to repeat to me in the French language the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.

"Oh, she is the most polite divinity it is possible to imagine! Yes, sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, young ladies?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the Naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I, in any one particular, exceeded the truth, Phyllis?"

I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais?"

"Precisely as you have stated, Madame," articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

"Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?"

"The perfect truth," replied Athenaïs, in a voice quite as firm, but yet not so distinct."

"And you, La Vallière?" asked Madame.

The poor girl felt the king's ardent look fixed upon her,—she dared not deny—she dared not tell a falsehood; she merely bowed her head; and everybody took it for a token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death. This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and, hardly knowing what he said, he stammered out, "An excellent jest! admirably played!"

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king, in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas had suffered, of endeavoring to surprise what is passing in the heart of shepherdesses? Assuredly I shall not, for one; and, you, gentlemen?"

"Nor I! nor I!" repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king's annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole affair. As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, "Well, comte, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, for instance?"

"I pity them with all my soul," replied De Guiche; "for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy, that to lose

it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved,—if they were happy in that idea, and if instead of that happiness, they meet not only that empty void which resembles death, but jeers and jests at love itself which is worse than a thousand deaths,—in that case, I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know.”

“And you are right, too, Monsieur de Guiche,” said the king; “for, in fact, the injury in question is a very hard return for a little harmless curiosity.”

“That is as much as to say, then, that the story of my Naiad has displeased the king?” asked Madame, innocently.

“Nay, madame, undeceive yourself,” said Louis, taking the princess by the hand; “your Naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me, and the more so, because she was so truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses.”

These words fell upon La Vallière, accompanied by a look that no one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the king’s remark succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who, with her head upon Montalais’s shoulder, seemed to have fainted away. The king rose, without remarking this circumstance, of which no one, moreover, took any notice, and, contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame’s apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. Saint-Aignan followed him, leaving the rooms in as much despair as he had entered them with delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive than La Vallière, was not much frightened, and did not faint. However, it may be that the last look of Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the king’s.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ROYAL PSYCHOLOGY.

THE king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gayety of manner, which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which they had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense: but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could tell the reason of. Madame's levity of manner, her somewhat bitter jests,—bitter for persons of a sensitive disposition, and particularly for one of the king's character; the great resemblance which naturally existed between the king and an ordinary mortal, were among the reasons assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of his majesty. Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain, without cause, the noblest and highest prize in France. It was not an unimportant matter for Madame, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station, and the running after each passing fancy, like a youth fresh from the provinces. With regard to those

higher placed affections, recognizing their dignity and their illimitable influence, acknowledging in them a certain etiquette and display—a monarch, not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of a common or humble attachment, he would encounter, even among his meanest subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to paltry contentions. In one word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than affection. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and, it has been seen, also, in what manner she carried it out. Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the middle ages, or that she regarded things from a pessimistic point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature, but rather from fancy, or imagination, or ambition, than from her heart—Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements, which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century, and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied she saw, things under their true aspect; she knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Vallière, and that, in accordance with his usual custom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was

not her vanity ever present, that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality, she a princess, young, beautiful and rich, be compared to the poor La Vallière, as youthful as herself it is true, but far less pretty certainly, and utterly without money, protectors or position? And surprise need not be excited with respect to Madame; for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparisons they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves. It may perhaps be asked what was Madame's motive for an attack so skillfully conceived and executed. Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not seriously her intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Vallière, if she did not fear her? Yet, Madame did not fear La Vallière in that direction in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather, the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which records in its most secret pages the most serious events. No, Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature; she wished to prove to him that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover in the arsenal of her imagination defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that, in a war of that description, kings are held of

no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous and insulting even, for certain persons who filled a higher position than others, and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service. Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The sequel itself was not thought of. And in this manner, it will be seen that she had exercised her influence over the minds of her maids of honor, and with all its accompanying details, had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. Similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. Strength comes with battle. But to match one's self with women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly for that purpose; it was the depth of dishonor for a young sovereign full of the pride his personal advantages and his royal power inspired him with. There was nothing he could do—neither reproaches, nor exile—nor could he even show the annoyance he felt. To manifest vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a sword from which the button had been removed—the sword of ridicule. To show animosity against women—humiliation! especially when the women in question have laughter on their side, as a means of vengeance. If, instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women,

one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis have seized the opportunity of turning the Bastille to personal account. But there, again, the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert such majesty and might in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man. It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was essential to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend!—Well, and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part, but at all events, it was but natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her married life to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow—a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal authority, had said to this young creature: be not afraid, love but the king of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptered hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse? And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and when, morally speaking, she had sacrificed her honor in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her in the world.

Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds

had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls? and was it for her, by an excess of zeal that might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully, in his own mind, gone over all the various causes of complaint, Louis was surprised, upon due reflection—in other words, after the wound has been dressed—to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance he dared not confess, even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart. The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Vallière's innocent confusion. He had dreamed of a pure affection—of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign—of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, simpler and more youthful than he had imagined it to be, had to meet that other heart that had revealed itself to him by its aspirations. The commonest thing in the complicated history of love, is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, in the same way that the latter finishes nearly always by loving after the other. In this way, the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Vallière showed her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had annoyed his majesty. For it was now fairly demonstrated to him, that no sympathetic current had been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case—because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and

towards the sovereign; and finally, because—and the word, too, burnt like a hot iron—because, in fact, it was nothing but a mystification after all. This girl, therefore, who, in strictness, could not lay claim to beauty, or birth, or great intelligence—who had been selected by Madame herself, on account of her unpretending position, had not only aroused the king's regard, but had, moreover, treated him with disdain—he, the king, a man who, like an eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to throw his handkerchief. And, since the previous evening, his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing else. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied clothing her image with charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had, since the previous evening, consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much, or not sufficient. The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and among others, that Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is, that Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a corner of the room; and from his corner, regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and, being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent. In point of fact, the king, all at once, did arrest his hurried pace; and, fixing

a look full of anger upon Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out : "And you, Saint-Aignan?"

Saint-Aignan made a sign which was intended to signify. "Well, sire?"

"Yes ; you have been as silly as myself, I think."

"Sire," stammered out Saint-Aignan.

"You permitted us to be deceived by this shameless trick."

"Sire," said Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, "let me entreat your majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are characters full of imperfections, created for the misfortune of mankind: to expect anything good from them is to require them to perform impossibilities."

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animosity about so trifling an object. "No," he said, hastily ; "you are mistaken, Saint-Aignan ; I am not angry ; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and with such audacity by these young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have informed ourselves accurately on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide."

"The heart, sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its material functions, but which, for the sake of humanity's peace of mind, should be deprived of all its metaphysical inclinations. For my own part, I confess, that when I saw that your majesty's heart was so taken up by this little——"

"My heart taken up ! I ! My mind might, perhaps, have been so ; but as for my heart, it was——" Louis again perceived that, in order to fill one gulf, he was

about to dig another. "Besides," he added, "I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your majesty of the circumstance."

"You did so; but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fère had solicited from me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for his son. And, on his return from England, the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other."

"I recognize your majesty's great generosity of disposition in that act."

"So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer," said Louis.

"Yes, we will digest the affront, sire," replied the courtier, with resignation.

"Besides, it will be an easy matter to do so," said the king, checking a sigh.

"And, by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of an epigram upon all three of them. I will call it 'The Naiad and Dryad,' which will please Madame."

"Do so, Saint-Aignan, do so," said the king, indifferently. "You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me. Ah! it does not signify, Saint-Aignan," added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty, "the blow requires more than human strength to support in a dignified manner." As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect.

"Come in," said the king. The servant partially opened the door. "What is it?" inquired Louis.

The servant held out a letter of a triangular shape. "For your majesty," he said.

"From whom?"

"I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it me."

The valet, in obedience to a gesture of the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry. Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on; but, without looking on, he saw and heard all, ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant. "Oh, Heavens!" said the king, as he read the note.

"Is your majesty unwell?" inquired Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.

"No, no, Saint-Aignan—read!" and he handed him the note.

Saint-Aignan's eyes fell upon the signature. "La Vallière!" he exclaimed. "Oh, sire!"

"Read, *read!*"

And Saint-Aignan read:—

"Forgive my importunity, sire; and forgive, also, the absence of the formalities which may be wanting in this letter. A note seems to be more speedy and more urgent than a dispatch. I venture, therefore, to address this note to your majesty. I have retired to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, sire; and I implore your majesty to grant me the favor of an audience which will enable me to confess the *truth* to my sovereign.

"LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE."

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.

"Well!" repeated Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know."

"Still, what is your opinion?"

"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."

"Frightened at what?" asked Louis with dignity.

"Why, your majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joke; and, if your majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."

"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."

"Your majesty doubtless sees more clearly than myself."

"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines; more particularly since I recall some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments——" The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed Saint-Aignan, "your majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that."

"I will do better, Saint-Aignan."

"What is that, sire?"

"Put on your cloak."

"But, sire——"

"You know the suite of rooms where Madame's maids of honor are lodged?"

"Certainly."

"You know some means of obtaining an entrance there."

"As far as that is concerned, I do not."

"At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there."

"Really, your majesty is the source of every good idea."

"You do know some one, then. Who is it?"

"I know a certain gentleman, who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there."

"One of the maids of honor?"

"Yes, sire."

"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?" said the king, laughing.

"Fortunately, no, sire; with Montalais."

"What is his name?"

"Malicorne."

"And you can depend on him?"

"I believe so, sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will let us have it."

"Nothing could be better. Let us set off, immediately."

The king threw his cloak over Saint-Aignan's shoulders, asked him for his, and both went out into the vestibule.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOMETHING THAT NEITHER NAIAD NOR DRYAD FORESAW.

SAINT-AIGNAN stopped at the foot of the staircase leading to the *entresol*, where the maids of honor were lodged, and to the first floor, where Madame's apartments were situated. Then, by means of one of the servants who was passing, he sent to apprise Malicorne, who was still with Monsieur. After having waited ten minutes, Malicorne arrived, full of self-importance. The king drew back towards the darkest part of the vestibule. Saint-Aignan, on the contrary, advanced to meet him, but at the first words, indicating his wish, Malicorne drew back abruptly.

"Oh! oh!" he said, "you want me to introduce you into the rooms of the maids of honor?"

"Yes."

"You know very well that I cannot do anything of the kind, without being made acquainted with your object."

"Unfortunately, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, it is quite impossible for me to give you any explanation; you must therefore confide in me as in a friend who got you out of a great difficulty yesterday, and who now begs you to draw him out of one to-day."

"Yet I told you, monsieur, what my object was; which was, not to sleep out in the open air, and any man might express the same wish, whilst you, however, admit nothing."

"Believe me, my dear Monsieur Malicorne," Saint-Aignan persisted, "that if I were permitted to explain myself, I would do so."

"In that case, my dear monsieur, it is impossible for me to allow you to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment."

"Why so?"

"You know why, better than any one else, since you caught me on the wall paying my addresses to Mademoiselle de Montalais; it would, therefore, be an excess of kindness on my part, you will admit, since I am paying my attentions to her, to open the door of her room to you."

"But who told you it was on her account I asked you for the key?"

"For whom, then?"

"She does not lodge there alone, I suppose?"

"No, certainly; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière shares her rooms with her; but, really, you have nothing more to do with Mademoiselle de la Vallière than with Mademoiselle de Montalais, and there are only two men to whom I would give this key; to M. de Bragelonne, if he

begged me to give it to him, and to the king, if he commanded me."

"In that case, give me the key, monsieur: I order you to do so," said the king, advancing from the obscurity, and partially opening his cloak. "Mademoiselle de Montalais will step down to talk with you, while we go upstairs to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, for, in fact, it is she only whom we desire to see."

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne, bowing to the very ground.

"Yes, the king," said Louis, smiling: "the king, who is as pleased with your resistance as with your capitulation. Rise, monsieur, and render us the service we request of you."

"I obey, your majesty," said Malicorne, leading the way up the staircase.

"Get Mademoiselle de Montalais to come down," said the king, "and do not breathe a word to her of my visit."

Malicorne bowed in token of obedience, and proceeded up the staircase. But the king, after a hasty reflection, followed him, and that, too, with such rapidity, that, although Malicorne was already more than half-way up the staircase, the king reached the room at the same moment. He then observed, by the door which remained half-opened behind Malicorne, La Vallière, sitting in an arm-chair with her head thrown back, and in the opposite corner Montalais, who, in her dressing-gown, was standing before a looking-glass, engaged in arranging her hair, and parleying the while with Malicorne. The king hurriedly opened the door and entered the room. Montalais called out at the noise made by the opening of the door, and, recognizing the king, made her escape. La Vallière rose from her seat, like a dead person galvanized, and then fell back in her arm-chair. The king advanced slowly towards her.

"You wished for an audience, I believe," he said coldly. "I am ready to hear you. Speak."

Saint-Aignan, faithful to his character of being deaf, blind, and dumb, had stationed himself in a corner of the door, upon a stool which by chance he found there. Concealed by the tapestry which covered the door way, and leaning his back against the wall, he could thus listen without being seen; resigning himself to the post of a good watch-dog, who patiently waits and watches without ever getting in his master's way.

La Vallière, terror-stricken at the king's irritated aspect, rose a second time, and assuming a posture full of humility and entreaty, murmured, "Forgive me, sire."

"What need is there for my forgiveness?" asked Louis.

"Sire, I have been guilty of a great fault; nay, more than a great fault, a great crime."

"You?"

"Sire, I have offended your majesty."

"Not the slightest degree in the world," replied Louis XIV.

"I implore you, sire, not to maintain towards me that terrible seriousness of manner which reveals your majesty's just anger. I feel I have offended you, sire; but I wish to explain to you how it was that I have not offended you of my own accord."

"In the first place," said the king, "in what way can you possibly have offended me? I cannot perceive how. Surely not on account of a young girl's harmless and very innocent jest? You turned the credulity of a young man into ridicule—it was very natural to do so: any other woman in your place would have done the same."

"Oh! your majesty overwhelms me by your remark."

"Why so?"

"Because, if I had been the author of the jest, it would not have been innocent."

"Well, is that all you had to say to me in soliciting an audience?" said the king, as though about to turn away.

Thereupon La Vallière, in an abrupt and broken voice, her eyes dried up by the fire of her tears, made a step towards the king, and said, "Did your majesty hear everything?"

"Everything, what?"

"Everything I said beneath the royal oak."

"I did not lose a syllable."

"And now, after your majesty really heard all, are you able to think I abused your credulity?"

"Credulity; yes, indeed you have selected the very word."

"And your majesty did not suppose that a poor girl like myself might possibly be compelled to submit to the will of others?"

"Forgive me," returned the king; "but I shall never be able to understand that she, who of her own free will could express herself so unreservedly beneath the royal oak, would allow herself to be influenced to such an extent by the direction of others."

"But the threat held out against me, sire."

"Threat! who threatened you—who dared to threaten you?"

"Those who have the right to do so, sire."

"I do not recognize any one as possessing the right to threaten the humblest of my subjects."

"Forgive me, sire, but near your majesty even, there are persons sufficiently high in position to have, or to believe that they possess, the right of injuring a young girl, without fortune, and possessing only her reputation."

"In what way injure her?"

"In depriving her of her reputation, by disgracefully expelling her from the court."

"Oh! Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king bitterly, "I prefer those persons who exculpate themselves without incriminating others."

"Sire!"

"Yes; and I confess that I greatly regret to perceive, that an easy justification, as your own would have been, is now complicated in my presence by a tissue of reproaches and imputations against others."

"And which you do not believe?" exclaimed La Vallière. The king remained silent.

"Nay, but tell me!" repeated La Vallière, vehemently.

"I regret to confess it," repeated the king, bowing coldly.

The young girl uttered a deep groan, striking her hands together in despair. "You do not believe me, then," she said to the king, who still remained silent, while poor La Vallière's features became visibly changed at his continued silence. "Therefore, you believe," she said, "that I prearranged this ridiculous, this infamous plot, of trifling, in so shameless a manner, with your majesty."

"Nay," said the king, "it was neither ridiculous nor infamous; it was not even a plot; merely a jest, more or less amusing, and nothing more."

"Oh!" murmured the young girl, "the king does not, and will not believe me, then?"

"No, indeed, I will not believe you," said the king. "Besides, in point of fact, what can be more natural? The king, you argue, follows me, listens to me, watches me; the king wishes perhaps to amuse himself at my expense, I will amuse myself at his, and as the king is very tender-hearted, I will take his heart by storm."

La Vallière hid her face in her hands, as she stifled

her sobs. The king continued pitilessly ; he was revenging himself upon the poor victim before him for all he had himself suffered.

"Let us invent, then, this story of my loving him and preferring him to others. The king is so simple and so conceited that he will believe me; and then we can go and tell others how credulous the king is, and can enjoy a laugh at his expense."

"Oh!" exclaimed La Vallière, "you think that you believe that!—it is frightful."

"And," pursued the king, "that is not all; if this self-conceited prince take our jest seriously, if he should be imprudent enough to exhibit before others anything like delight at it, well, in that case, the king will be humiliated before the whole court; and what a delightful story it will be, too, for him to whom I am really attached, in fact part of my dowry for my husband, to have the adventure to relate of the monarch who was so amusingly deceived by a young girl."

"Sire!" exclaimed La Vallière, her mind bewildered, almost wandering, indeed, "not another word, I implore you; do you not see that you are killing me?"

"A jest, nothing but a jest," murmured the king, who however, began to be somewhat affected.

La Vallière fell upon her knees, and that so violently, that the sound could be heard upon the hard floor. "Sire," she said, "I prefer shame to disloyalty."

"What do you mean?" inquired the king, without moving a step to raise the young girl from her knees.

"Sire, when I shall have sacrificed my honor and my reason both to you, you will perhaps believe in my loyalty. The tale which was related to you in Madame's apartments, and by Madame herself, is utterly false; and that which I said beneath the great oak——"

"Well!"

"That only is the truth."

"What!" exclaimed the king.

"Sire," exclaimed La Vallière, hurried away by the violence of her emotions, "were I to die of shame on the very spot where my knees are fixed, I would repeat it until my latest breath; I said that I loved you, and it is true; I do love you."

"You!"

"I have loved you, sire, from the very first day I ever saw you; from the moment when at Blois, where I was pining away my existence, your royal looks, full of light and life, were first bent upon me. I love you still, sire; it is a crime of high treason, I know, that a poor girl like myself should love her sovereign, and should presume to tell him so. Punish me for my audacity, despise me for my shameless immodesty; but do not ever say, do not ever think, that I have jested with or deceived you. I belong to a family whose loyalty has been proved, sire, and I, too, love my king."

Suddenly her strength, voice and respiration ceased, and she fell forward, like the flower Virgil alludes to, which the scythe of the reaper severed in the midst of the grass. The king, at these words, at this vehement entreaty, no longer retained either ill-will or doubt in his mind: his whole heart seemed to expand at the glowing breath of an affection which proclaimed itself in such noble and courageous language. When, therefore, he heard the passionate confession of that young girl's affection, his strength seemed to fail him, and he hid his face in his hands. But when he felt La Vallière's hands clinging to his own, when their warm pressure fired his blood, he bent forward, and passing his arm round La Vallière's waist, he raised her from the ground and pressed her against his heart. But she, her drooping head fallen forward on her bosom, seemed to have ceased to live. The king,

terrified, called out for Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan, who had carried his discretion so far as to remain without stirring in his corner, pretending to wipe away a tear, ran forward at the king's summons. He then assisted Louis to seat the young girl upon a couch, slapped her hands, sprinkled some Hungary water over her face, calling out all the while, "Come, come, it is all over; the king believes you, and forgives you. There, there now! take care, or you will agitate his majesty too much; his majesty is so sensitive, so tender-hearted. Now, really, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, you must pay attention, for the king is very pale."

The fact was, the king was visibly losing color. But La Vallière did not move.

"Do pray recover," continued Saint-Aignan. "I beg, I implore you; it is really time you should; think only of one thing, that if the king should become unwell, I should be obliged to summon his physician. What a state of things that would be! So do pray rouse yourself; make an effort, pray do, and do so at once, my dear."

It was difficult to display more persuasive eloquence than Saint-Aignan did, but something still more powerful, and of a more energetic nature than this eloquence, aroused La Vallière. The king, who was kneeling before her, covered the palms of her hands with those burning kisses which are to the hands what a kiss upon the lips is to the face. La Vallière's senses returned to her; she languidly opened her eyes, and with a dying look, murmured, "Oh! sire, has your majesty pardoned me, then?"

The king did not reply, for he was still too much overcome. Saint-Aignan thought it his duty again to retire, for he observed the passionate devotion which was displayed in the king's gaze. La Vallière rose.

"And now, sire, that I have justified myself, at least I trust so, in your majesty's eyes, grant me leave to retire

into a convent. I shall bless your majesty all my life, and I shall die there thanking and loving Heaven for having granted me one hour of perfect happiness."

"No, no," replied the king, "you will live here blessing Heaven, on the contrary, but loving Louis, who will make your existence one of perfect felicity—Louis who loves you—Louis who swears it."

"Oh! sire, sire!"

And upon this doubt of La Vallière, the king's kisses became so warm that Saint-Aignan thought it his duty to retire behind the tapestry. These kisses, however, which she had not had the strength at first to resist, began to intimidate the young girl.

"Oh! sire," she exclaimed, "do not make me repent my loyalty, for this would show me that your majesty despises me still."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king suddenly, drawing back with an air full of respect, "there is nothing in the world that I love and honor more than yourself, and nothing in my court, I call Heaven to witness, shall be so highly regarded as you shall be henceforward. I entreat your forgiveness for my transport; it arose from an excess of affection, but I can prove to you that I love you more than ever by respecting you as much as you can possibly desire or deserve." Then bending before her, and taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Will you honor me by accepting the kiss I press upon your hand?" And the king's lips were pressed respectfully and lightly upon the young girl's trembling hand. "Henceforth," added Louis, rising and bending his glance upon La Vallière, "henceforth you are under my safeguard. Do not speak to any one of the injury I have done you, forgive others that which they may have attempted. For the future, you shall be so far above all those, that, far from inspiring you with fear,

they shall be even beneath your pity." And he bowed as reverently as though he were leaving a place of worship. Then calling to Saint-Aignan, who approached with great humility, he said, "I hope, comte, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière will kindly confer a little of her friendship upon you, in return for that which I have vowed to her eternally."

Saint-Aignan bent his knee before La Vallière, saying, "How happy, indeed, would such an honor make me!"

"I will send your companion back to you," said the king. "Farewell! or, rather, adieu till we meet again; do not forget me in your prayers, I entreat."

"Oh!" cried La Vallière, "be assured that you and Heaven are in my heart together."

These words of Louise elated the king, who, full of happiness, hurried Saint-Aignan down the stairs. Madame had not anticipated this *dénouement*; and neither the Naiad nor the Dryad had breathed a word about it.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NEW GENERAL OF THE JESUITS.

WHILE La Vallière and the king were mingling, in their first confession of love, all the bitterness of the past, the happiness of the present, and hopes of the future, Fouquet had retired to the apartments which had been assigned to him in the château, and was conversing with Aramis precisely upon the very subjects which the king at that moment was forgetting.

"Now tell me," began Fouquet, after having installed his guest in an arm-chair and seated himself by his side, "tell me, Monsieur d'Herblay, what is our position

with regard to the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have received any news about it."

"Everything is going on in that direction as we wish," replied Aramis; "the expenses have been paid, and nothing has transpired of our designs."

"But what about the soldiers the king wished to send there?"

"I have received news this morning that they arrived there fifteen days ago."

"And how have they been treated?"

"In the best manner possible."

"What has become of the former garrison?"

"The soldiers were landed at Sarzeau, and then transferred immediately to Quimper."

"And the new garrison?"

"Belongs to us from this very moment."

"Are you sure of what you say, my dear Monsieur de Vannes?"

"Quite sure, and, moreover, you will see by and by how matters have turned out."

"Still you are very well aware that, of all the garrison towns, Belle-Isle is precisely the very worst."

"I know it, and have acted accordingly; no space to move about, no gayety, no cheerful society, no gambling permitted: well, it is a great pity," added Aramis, with one of those smiles so peculiar to him, "to see how much young people at the present day seek amusement, and how much, consequently, they incline to the man who procures and pays for their favorite pastimes."

"But if they amuse themselves at Belle-Isle?"

"If they amuse themselves through the king's means, they will attach themselves to the king; but if they get bored to death through the king's means, and amuse themselves through M. Fouquet, they will attach themselves to M. Fouquet."

"And you informed my intendant, of course?—so that immediately on their arrival——"

"By no means; they were left alone a whole week, to weary themselves at their ease; but, at the end of the week, they cried out, saying that former officers amused themselves much better. Whereupon they were told that the old officers had been able to make a friend of M. Fouquet, and that M. Fouquet, knowing them to be friends of his, had from that moment done all he possibly could to prevent their getting wearied or bored upon his estates. Upon this they began to reflect. Immediately afterwards, however, the intendant added, that without anticipating M. Fouquet's orders, he knew his master sufficiently well to be aware that he took an interest in every gentleman in the king's service, and that, although he did not know the new-comers, he would do as much for them as he had done for the others."

"Excellent! and I trust that the promises were followed up; I desire, as you know, that no promise should ever be made in my name without being kept."

"Without a moment's loss of time, our two privateers, and your own horses, were placed at the disposal of the officers; the keys of the principal mansion were handed over to them, so that they made up hunting-parties, and walking-excursions with such ladies as are to be found in Belle-Isle; and such other as they are enabled to enlist from the neighborhood, who have no fear of sea-sickness.

"And there is a fair sprinkling to be met with at Sarzeau and Vannes, I believe, your eminence?"

"Yes; in fact all along the coast," said Aramis, quietly.

"And now, how about the soldiers?"

"Everything precisely the same, in a relative degree, you understand; the soldiers have plenty of wine, excellent provisions, and good pay."

"Very good ; so that——"

"So that this garrison can be depended upon, and it is a better one than the last."

"Good."

"The result is, if Fortune favors us, so that the garrisons are changed in this manner, only every two months, that, at the end of every three years, the whole army will, in its turn, have been there ; and, therefore, instead of having one regiment in our favor, we shall have fifty thousand men."

"Yes, yes ; I knew perfectly well," said Fouquet, "that no friend could be more incomparable and invaluable than yourself, my dear Monsieur d'Herblay ; but," he added, laughing, "all this time we are forgetting our friend, Du Vallon ; what has become of him ? During the three days I spent at Saint-Mandé, I confess I have forgotten him completely."

"I do not forget him, however," returned Aramis. "Porthos is at Saint-Mandé ; his joints are kept well greased, the greatest care is being taken of him with regard to the food he eats, and the wines he drinks ; I advise him to take daily airings in the small park, which you have kept for your own use, and he makes use of it accordingly. He begins to walk again, he exercises his muscular powers by bending down young elm trees, or making the old oaks fly into splinters, as Milo of Crotona used to do ; and, as there are no lions in the park, it is not unlikely we shall find him alive. Porthos is a brave fellow."

"Yes, but in the mean time he will get bored to death."

"Oh no ; he never does that."

"He will be asking questions ?"

"He sees no one."

"At all events, he is looking or hoping for something or another."

"I have inspired in him a hope which we will realize some fine morning, and on that he subsists."

"What is it?"

"That of being presented to the king."

"Oh! in what character?"

"As the engineer of Belle-Isle, of course."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite true."

"Shall we not be obliged then, to send him back to Belle-Isle?"

"Most certainly; I am even thinking of sending him as soon as possible. Porthos is very fond of display; he is a man whose weaknesses D'Artagnan, Athos, and myself are alone acquainted with; he never commits himself in any way; he is dignity itself; to the officers there, he would seem like a Paladin of the time of the Crusades. He would make the whole staff drunk, without getting tipsy in the least himself, and every one will regard him with admiration and sympathy; if, therefore, it should happen that we have any orders requiring to be carried out, Porthos is an incarnation of the order itself, and whatever he chose to do others would find themselves obliged to submit to."

"Send him back then."

"That is what I intend to do; but only in a few days; for I must not omit to tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"I begin to mistrust D'Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have noticed, and D'Artagnan is never absent, or apparently idle, without some object in view. And now that my own affairs are settled, I am going to try and ascertain what the affairs are in which D'Artagnan is engaged."

"Your own affairs are settled, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are very fortunate in that case, then, and I should like to be able to say the same."

"I hope you do not make yourself uneasy."

"Hum!"

"Nothing could be better than the king's reception of you."

"True."

"And Colbert leaves you in peace."

"Nearly so."

"In that case," said Aramis, with that connection of ideas which marked him, "in that case, then, we can bestow a thought upon the young girl I was speaking to you about yesterday."

"Whom do you mean?"

"What, have you forgotten already? I mean La Val-
lière."

"Ah! of course, of course."

"Do you object then to try and make a conquest of her?"

"In one respect only, my heart is engaged in another direction; and I positively do not care about the girl in the least."

"Oh! oh!" said Aramis, "your heart is engaged, you say. The deuce! we must take care of that."

"Why?"

"Because it is terrible to have the heart occupied, when others, beside yourself, have so much need of the head."

"You are right. So you see, at your first summons, I left everything. But to return to this girl. What good do you see in my troubling myself about her?"

"This.—The king, it is said, has taken a fancy to her; at least, so it is supposed."

"But you, who know everything, know very differently."

"I know that the king is greatly and suddenly changed,

that the day before yesterday he was crazy over Madame; that a few days ago, Monsieur complained of it, even to the queen-mother; and that some conjugal misunderstandings and maternal scoldings were the consequence."

"How do you know all that?"

"I do know it; at all events, since these misunderstandings and scoldings, the king has not addressed a word, has not paid the slightest attention, to her royal highness."

"Well, what next?"

"Since then, he has been taken up with Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Now, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is one of Madame's maids of honor. You happen to know, I suppose, what is called a *chaperon* in matters of love. Well, then, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is Madame's *chaperon*. It is for you to take advantage of this state of things. You have no occasion for me to tell you that. But, at all events, wounded vanity will render the conquest an easier one; the girl will get hold of the king, and Madame's secret, and you can scarcely predict what a man of intelligence can do with a secret."

"But how to get at her?"

"Nay, you, of all men, to ask me such a question!" said Aramis.

"Very true. I shall not have any time to take any notice of her."

"She is poor and unassuming, you will create a position for her, and whether she tames the king as his lady confessor, or his sweetheart, you will have enlisted a new and valuable ally."

"Very good," said Fouquet. "What is to be done, then, with regard to this girl?"

"Whenever you have taken a fancy to any lady, Monsieur Fouquet, what course have you generally pursued?"

"I have written to her, protesting my devotion to her."

I have added, how happy I should be to render her any service in my power, and have signed 'Fouquet,' at the end of the letter."

"And has any one offered any resistance?"

"One person only," replied Fouquet. "But, four days ago, she yielded, as the others had done."

"Will you take the trouble to write?" said Aramis, holding a pen towards him, which Fouquet took, saying:

"I will write at your dictation. My head is so taken up in another direction, that I should not be able to write a couple of lines."

"Very well," said Aramis, "write."

And he dictated, as follows: "Mademoiselle—I have seen you—and you will not be surprised to learn, I think you very beautiful. But, for want of the position you merit at court, your presence there is a waste of time. The devotion of a man of honor, should ambition of any kind inspire you, might possibly serve as a means of display for your talents and beauty. I place my devotion at your feet; but, as an affection, however reserved and unassuming it may be, might possibly, compromise the object of its worship, it would ill become a person of your merit running the risk of being compromised, without her future being assured. If you would deign to accept, and reply to my affection, my affection shall prove its gratitude to you in making you free and independent forever."

Having finished writing, Fouquet looked at Aramis.

"Sign it," said the latter.

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Your signature at the foot of that letter is worth a million; you forget that." Fouquet signed.

"Now, by whom do you intend to send this letter?" asked Aramis.

"By an excellent servant of mine."

"Can you rely on him?"

"He is a man who has been with me all my life."

"Very well. Besides, in this case, we are not playing for very heavy stakes."

"How so? For if what you say be true of the accommodating disposition of this girl for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can ask for."

"The king has money, then?" asked Aramis.

"I suppose so, for he has not asked me for any more."

"Be easy, he will ask for some, soon."

"Nay, more than that, I had thought he would have spoken to me about the *fête* at Vaux, but he never said a word about it."

"He will be sure to do so, though."

"You must think the king's disposition a very cruel one, Monsieur d'Herblay?"

"It is not he who is so."

"He is young, and therefore his disposition is a kind one."

"He is young, and either he is weak, or his passions are strong; and Monsieur Colbert holds his weaknesses and his passions in his villainous grasp."

"You admit that you fear him?"

"I do not deny it."

"In that case I am lost."

"Why so?"

"My only influence with the king has been through the money I commanded, and now I am a ruined man."

"Not so."

"What do you mean by 'not so?' Do you know my affairs better than myself?"

"That is not unlikely."

"If he were to request this *fête* to be given?"

"You would give it, of course."

"But where is the money to come from?"

"Have you ever been in want of any?"

"Oh! if you only knew at what a cost I procured the last supply?"

"The next shall cost you nothing."

"But who will give it me?"

"I will."

"What, give me six millions?"

"Ten, if necessary."

"Upon my word, D'Herblay," said Fouquet, "your confidence alarms me more than the king's displeasure. Who can you possibly be after all?"

"You know me well enough, I should think."

"Of course; but what is it you are aiming at?"

"I wish to see upon the throne of France a king devoted to Monsieur Fouquet, and I wish Monsieur Fouquet to be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand,—“as for being devoted to you, I am yours, entirely; but believe me, my dear D'Herblay, you are deceiving yourself."

"In what respect?"

"The king will never become devoted to me."

"I do not remember to have said that King Louis would ever become devoted to you."

"Why, on the contrary, you have this moment said so."

"I did not say *the* king; I said *a* king."

"Is it not all the same?"

"No, on the contrary, it is altogether different."

"I do not understand you."

"You will do so, shortly, then; suppose, for instance, the king in question were to be a very different person to Louis XIV."

"Another person."

"Yes, who is indebted for everything to you."

"Impossible."

"His very throne, even."

"You are mad, D'Herblay. There is no man living besides Louis XIV. who can sit on the throne of France. I know of none, not one."

"*But* I know one."

"Unless it be Monsieur," said Fouquet, looking at Aramis uneasily; "yet Monsieur——"

"It is *not* Monsieur."

"But how can it be, that a prince not of the royal line, that a prince without any right——"

"My king, or rather your king will be everything that is necessary, be assured of that."

"Be careful, Monsieur d'Herblay, you make my blood run cold, and my head swim."

Aramis smiled. "There is but little occasion for that," he replied.

"Again, I repeat, you terrify me," said Fouquet. Aramis smiled.

"You laugh," said Fouquet.

"The day will come when you will laugh too; only at the present moment I must laugh alone."

"But explain yourself."

"When the proper time comes, I will explain all. Fear nothing. Have faith in me, and doubt nothing."

"The fact is, I cannot but doubt, because I do not see clearly, or even at all."

"That is because of your blindness; but a day will come when you will be enlightened."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "how willingly would I believe."

"You, without belief! you, who, through my means, have ten times crossed the abyss yawning at your feet, and in which, had you been alone, you would have been irretrievably swallowed; you, without belief; you, who from procureur-general attained the rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant that of the first minister of the crown, and who from the rank of first minister will

pass to that of mayor of the palace. But no," he said, with the same unaltered smile, "no, no, you cannot see, and consequently cannot believe—what I tell you." And Aramis rose to withdraw.

"One word more," said Fouquet, "you have never yet spoken to me in this manner, you have never yet shown yourself so confident, I should rather say so daring."

"Because, it is necessary in order to speak confidently to have the lips unfettered."

"And that is now your case?"

"Yes."

"Since a very short time, then?"

"Since yesterday, only."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Herblay, take care, your confidence is becoming audacity."

"One can well be audacious when one is powerful."

"And you are powerful?"

"I have already offered you ten millions; I repeat the offer."

Fouquet rose, profoundly agitated.

"Come," he said, "come; you spoke of overthrowing kings and replacing them by others. If, indeed, I am not really out of my senses, is or is not that what you said just now?"

"You are by no means out of your senses, for it is perfectly true I did say all that just now."

"And why did you say so?"

"Because it is easy to speak in this manner of thrones being cast down, and kings being raised up, when one is, one's self, far above all kings and thrones, of this world at least."

"Your power is infinite, then?" cried Fouquet.

"I have told you so already, and I repeat it," replied Aramis, with glistening eyes and trembling lips.

Fouquet threw himself back in his chair, and buried his

face in his hands. Aramis looked at him for a moment, as the angel of human destinies might have looked upon a simple mortal.

"Adieu," he said to him, "sleep undisturbed, and send your letter to La Vallière. To-morrow we shall see each other again."

"Yes, to-morrow," said Fouquet, shaking his hand like a man returning to his senses. "But where shall we see each other?"

"At the king's promenade, if you like."

"Agreed." And they separated.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STORM.

THE dawn of the following day was dark and gloomy, and as every one knew that the promenade was down in the royal programme, every one's gaze, as his eyes were opened, was directed towards the sky. Just above the tops of the trees a thick, suffocating vapor seemed to remain suspended, with barely sufficient power to rise thirty feet above the ground under the influence of the sun's rays, which was scarcely visible as a faint spot of lesser darkness through the veil of heavy mist. No dew had fallen in the morning; the turf was dried up for want of moisture, the flowers withered. The birds sang less inspiringly than usual upon the boughs, which remained motionless as the limbs of corpses. The strange confused and animated murmurs, which seemed born and to exist in virtue of the sun, that respiration of nature which is unceasingly heard amidst all other sounds, could not be heard now, and never had the silence been so profound.

The king had noticed the cheerless aspect of the heavens

as he approached the window immediately on rising. But as all the necessary directions had been given respecting the promenade, and every preparation had been made accordingly, and as, which was far more imperious than anything else, Louis relied upon this promenade to satisfy the cravings of his imagination, and we will even already say, the clamorous desires of his heart—the king unhesitatingly decided that the appearance of the heavens had nothing whatever to do with the matter; that the promenade was arranged, and that, whatever the state of the weather, the promenade should take place. Besides, there are certain terrestrial sovereigns who seem to have accorded them privileged existences, and there are certain times when it might almost be supposed that the expressed wish of an earthly monarch has its influence over the Divine will. It was Virgil who observed of Augustus: *Nocte placet tota redeunt spectacula mæne*. Louis attended mass as usual, but it was evident that his attention was somewhat distracted from the presence of the Creator by the remembrance of the creature. His mind was occupied during the service in reckoning more than once the number of minutes, then of seconds, which separated him from the blissful moment when the promenade would begin, that is to say, the moment when Madame would set out with her maids of honor. Besides, as a matter of course, everybody at the château was ignorant of the interview which had taken place between La Vallière and the king. Montalais, perhaps, with her usual chattering propensity, might have been disposed to talk about it; but Montalais on this occasion was held in check by Malicorne, who had securely fastened on her pretty lips the golden padlock of mutual interest. As for Louis XIV., his happiness was so extreme that he had forgiven Madame, or nearly so, her little piece of malice of the previous evening. In fact, he had occasion to congratulate himself rather than to complain of

it. Had it not been for her ill-natured action, he would not have received the letter from La Vallière; had it not been for the letter, he would have had no interview; and had it not been for the interview he would have remained undecided. His heart was filled with too much happiness for any ill-feeling to remain in it, at that moment at least. Instead, therefore, of knitting his brows into a frown when he perceived his sister-in-law, Louis resolved to receive her in a more friendly and gracious manner than usual. But on one condition only, that she would be ready to set out early. Such was the nature of Louis's thoughts during mass; which made him during the ceremony, forget matters, which, in his character of Most Christian King and of the eldest son of the Church, ought to have occupied his attention. He returned to the château, and as the promenade was fixed for midday, and it was at present just ten o'clock, he set to work desperately with Colbert and Lyonne. But even while he worked Louis went from the table to the window, inasmuch as the window looked out upon Madame's pavilion: he could see M. Fouquet in the courtyard, to whom the courtiers, since the favor shown towards him on the previous evening, paid greater attention than ever. The king, instinctively, on noticing Fouquet, turned towards Colbert, who was smiling, and seemed full of benevolence and delight, a state of feeling which had arisen from the very moment one of his secretaries had entered and handed him a pocket-book, which he had put unopened into his pocket. But, as there was always something sinister at the bottom of any delight expressed by Colbert, Louis preferred, of the smiles of the two men, that of Fouquet. He beckoned to the superintendent to come up, and then turning towards Lyonne and Colbert he said:—"Finish this matter, place it on my desk, and I will read it at my leisure." And he left the room. At the sign the king

had made to him, Fouquet had hastened up the staircase, while Aramis, who was with the superintendent, quietly retired among the group of courtiers, and disappeared without having been even observed by the king. The king and Fouquet met at the top of the staircase.

"Sire," said Fouquet, remarking the gracious manner in which Louis was about to receive him, "Your majesty has overwhelmed me with kindness during the last few days. It is not a youthful monarch, but a being of a higher order, who reigns over France, one whom pleasure, happiness, and love acknowledge as their master." The king colored. The compliment, although flattering, was not the less somewhat pointed. Louis conducted Fouquet to a small room that divided his study from his sleeping apartment.

"Do you know why I summoned you?" said the king as he seated himself upon the edge of the window, so as not to lose anything that might be passing in the gardens which fronted the opposite entrance to Madame's pavilion.

"No, sire," replied Fouquet, "but I am sure for something agreeable, if I am to judge from your majesty's gracious smile."

"You are mistaken then."

"I, sire?"

"For I summoned you, on the contrary, to pick a quarrel with you."

"With me, sire?"

"Yes : and that a serious one."

"Your majesty alarms me—and yet I was most confident in your justice and goodness."

"Do you know I am told, Monsieur Fouquet, that you are preparing a grand *fête* at Vaux."

Fouquet smiled, as a sick man would do at the first shiver of a fever which has left him but returns again.

"And that you have not invited me!" continued the king.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "I have not even thought of the *fête* you speak of, and it was only yesterday evening that one of my *friends*," Fouquet laid a stress upon the word, "was kind enough to make me think of it."

"Yet I saw you yesterday evening, Monsieur Fouquet, and you said nothing to me about it."

"How dared I hope that your majesty would so greatly descend from your own exalted station as to honor my dwelling with your royal presence?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Fouquet, you did not speak to me about your *fête*."

"I did not allude to the *fête* to your majesty, I repeat, in the first place, because nothing had been decided with regard to it, and, secondly, because I feared a refusal."

"And something made you fear a refusal, Monsieur Fouquet? You see I am determined to push you hard."

"The profound wish I had that your majesty should accept my invitation——"

"Well, Monsieur Fouquet, nothing is easier, I perceive, than our coming to an understanding. Your wish is to invite me to your *fête*, my own is to be present at it; invite me and I will go."

"Is it possible that your majesty will deign to accept?" murmured the superintendent.

"Why, really, monsieur," said the king, laughing; "I think I do more than accept; I rather fancy I am inviting myself."

"Your majesty overwhelms me with honor and delight," exclaimed Fouquet, "but I shall be obliged to repeat what M. Vieuville said to your ancestor, Henry the Fourth, *Domine, non sum dignus*."

"To which I reply, Monsieur Fouquet, that if you give a *fête*, I will go, whether I am invited or not."

"I thank your majesty deeply," said Fouquet, as he

raised his head beneath this favor, which he was convinced would be his ruin.

"But how could your majesty have been informed of it?"

"By public rumor, Monsieur Fouquet, which says such wonderful things of yourself and of the marvels of your house. Would you become proud, Monsieur Fouquet, if the king were to be jealous of you?"

"I should be the happiest man in the world, sire, since the very day on which your majesty were to be jealous of Vaux, I should possess something worthy of being offered to you."

"Very well, Monsieur Fouquet, prepare your *fête*, and open the doors of your house as wide as possible."

"It is for your majesty to fix the day."

"This day month, then."

"Has your majesty any further commands?"

"Nothing, Monsieur Fouquet, except from the present moment until then to have you near me as much as possible."

"I have the honor to form one of your majesty's party for the promenade."

"Very good; indeed I am now setting out; for there are the ladies, I see, who are going to start."

With this remark, the king, with all the eagerness, not only of a young man, but of a young man in love, withdrew from the window, in order to take his gloves and cane, which his valet held ready for him. The neighing of the horses and the crunching of the wheels on the gravel of the courtyard could be distinctly heard. The king descended the stairs, and at the moment he appeared upon the flight of steps, every one stopped. The king walked straight up to the young queen. The queen-mother, who was still suffering more than ever from the illness with which she was afflicted, did not wish to go out. Maria

Theresa accompanied Madame in her carriage, and asked the king in what direction he wished the promenade to drive. The king, who had just seen La Vallière, still pale from the events of the previous evening, get into a carriage with three of her companions, told the queen that he had no preference, and wherever she would like to go, there would he be with her. The queen then desired that the outriders should proceed in the direction of Apremont. The outriders set off accordingly before the others. The king rode on horseback, and for a few minutes accompanied the carriage of the queen and Madame. The weather had cleared up a little, but a kind of veil of dust, like a thick gauze, was still spread over the surface of the heavens, and the sun made every atom glisten within the circuit of its rays. The heat was stifling; but, as the king did not seem to pay any attention to the appearance of the heavens, no one made himself uneasy about it, and the promenade, in obedience to the orders given by the queen, took its course in the direction of Apremont. The courtiers who followed were in the very highest spirits; it was evident that every one tried to forget, and to make others forget, the bitter discussions of the previous evening. Madame, particularly, was delightful. In fact, seeing the king at the door of her carriage, as she did not suppose he would be there for the queen's sake, she hoped that her prince had returned to her. Hardly, however, had they proceeded a quarter of a mile on the road, when the king, with a gracious smile, saluted them and drew up his horse, leaving the queen's carriage to pass on, then that of the principal ladies of honor, and then all the others in succession, who, seeing the king stop, wished in their turn to stop too; but the king made a sign to them to continue their progress. When La Vallière's carriage passed, the king approached it, saluted the ladies who were inside, and was preparing to accompany the carriage containing

the maids of honor, in the same way he had followed that in which Madame was, when suddenly the whole file of carriages stopped. It was probable that Madame, uneasy at the king having left her, had just given directions for the performance of this maneuver, the direction in which the promenade was to take place having been left to her. The king having sent to inquire what her object was in stopping the cavalcade was informed in reply, that she wished to walk. She most likely hoped that the king, who was following the carriages of the maids of honor on horseback, would not venture to follow the maids of honor themselves on foot. They had arrived in the middle of the forest.

The promenade, in fact, was not ill-timed, especially for those who were dreamers or lovers. From the little open space where the halt had taken place, three beautiful long walks, shady and undulating, stretched out before them. These walks were covered with moss or with leaves that formed a carpet from the loom of nature; and each walk had its horizon in the distance, consisting of about a hand-breadth of sky, apparent through the interlacing of the branches of the trees. At the end of almost every walk, evidently in great tribulation and uneasiness, the startled deer were seen hurrying to and fro, first stopping for a moment in the middle of the path, and then raising their heads they fled with the speed of an arrow or bounded into the depths of the forest, where they disappeared from view; now and then a rabbit, of philosophical mien, might be noticed quietly sitting upright, rubbing his muzzle with his fore paws, and looking about inquiringly, as though wondering whether all these people, who were approaching in his direction, and who had just disturbed him in his meditations and his meal were not followed by their dogs, or had not their guns under their arms. All alighted from their carriages as soon as they observed that the queen was doing so. Maria Theresa took the arm of one of her

ladies of honor, and, with a side glance towards the king, who did not perceive that he was in the slightest degree the object of the queen's attention, entered the forest by the first path before her. Two of the outriders preceded her majesty with long poles, which they used for the purpose of putting the branches of the trees aside, or removing the bushes that might impede her progress. As soon as Madame alighted, she found the Comte de Guiche at her side, who bowed and placed himself at her disposal. Monsieur, delighted with his bath of the two previous days, had announced his preference for the river, and, having given De Guiche leave of absence, remained at the château with the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp. He was not in the slightest degree jealous. He had been looked for to no purpose among those present; but as Monsieur was a man who thought a great deal of himself, and usually added very little to the general pleasure, his absence was rather a subject of satisfaction than regret. Every one had followed the example which the queen and Madame had set, doing just as they pleased, according as chance or fancy influenced them. The king, we have already observed, remained near La Vallière, and, throwing himself off his horse at the moment the door of her carriage was opened, he offered her his hand to alight. Montalais and Tonnay-Charente immediately drew back and kept at a distance; the former from calculation, the latter from natural motives. There was this difference, however, between the two, that the one had withdrawn from a wish to please the king, the other for a very opposite reason. During the last half-hour the weather also had undergone a change; the veil which had been spread over the sky, as if driven by a blast of heated air had become massed together in the western part of the heavens; and afterwards, as if driven by a current of air from the opposite direction, was now advancing slowly and heavily towards them.

The approach of the storm could be felt, but as the king did not perceive it, no one thought it proper to do so. The promenade was therefore continued ; some of the company, with minds ill at ease on the subject, raised their eyes from time to time towards the sky ; others, even more timid still, walked about without wandering too far from the carriages, where they relied upon taking shelter in case the storm burst. The greater number of these, however, observing that the king fearlessly entered the wood with La Vallière, followed his majesty. The king noticing this, took La Vallière's hand, and led her to a lateral forest-alley ; where no one this time ventured to follow him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHOWER OF RAIN.

At this moment, and in the same direction, too, that the king and La Vallière had taken, except that they were in the wood itself instead of following the path, two men were walking together, utterly indifferent to the appearance of the heavens. Their heads were bent down in the manner of people occupied with matters of great moment. They had not observed either De Guiche or Madame, the king or La Vallière. Suddenly something fell through the air like a colossal sheet of flame, followed by a loud but distant rumbling noise.

"Ah !" said one of them, raising his head, " here comes the storm. Let us reach our carriages, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis looked inquiringly at the heavens. "There is no occasion to hurry yet," he said ; and then resuming the conversation where it had doubtless been interrupted, he said, " You were observing that the letter we wrote

last evening must by this time have reached its destination?"

"I was saying that she certainly has it."

"Whom did you send it by?"

"By my own servant, as I have already told you."

"Did he bring back an answer?"

"I have not seen him since; the young girl was probably in attendance on Madame, or was in her own room dressing, and he may have had to wait. Our time for leaving arrived, and we set off, of course; I cannot, therefore, know what is going on yonder."

"Did you see the king before leaving?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem?"

"Nothing could have passed off better, or worse; according as he be sincere or hypocritical."

"And the *fête*?"

"Will take place in a month."

"He invited himself, you say?"

"With a pertinacity in which I detected Colbert's influence. But has not last night removed your illusions?"

"What illusions?"

"With respect to the assistance you may be able to give me under these circumstances."

"No; I have passed the night writing, and all my orders are given."

"Do not conceal it from yourself, D'Herblay, but the *fête* will cost some millions."

"I will supply six; do you on your side get two or three."

"You are a wonderful man, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis smiled.

"But," inquired Fouquet, with some remaining uneasiness, "how is it that while now you are squandering millions in this manner, a few days ago you did not pay

the fifty thousand francs to Baisemeaux out of your own pocket?"

"Because a few days ago I was as poor as Job."

"And to-day?"

"To-day I am wealthier than the king himself."

"Very well," said Fouquet; "I understand men pretty well; I know you are incapable of forfeiting your word; I do not wish to wrest your secret from you, and so let us talk no more about it."

At this moment a dull, heavy rumbling was heard, which suddenly developed into a violent clap of thunder.

"Oh, oh!" said Fouquet, "I was quite right in what I said."

"Come," said Aramis, "let us rejoin the carriages."

"We shall not have time," said Fouquet, "for here comes the rain."

In fact, as he spoke, and as if the heavens were opened, a shower of large drops of rain was suddenly heard pattering on the leaves about them.

"We shall have time," said Aramis, "to reach the carriage before the foliage becomes saturated."

"It will be better," said Fouquet, "to take shelter somewhere—in a grotto, for instance."

"Yes, but where are we to find a grotto?" inquired Aramis.

"I know one," said Fouquet, smiling, "not ten paces from here." Then looking round him, he added: "Yes, we are quite right."

"You are very fortunate to have so good a memory," said Aramis, smiling in his turn, "but are you not afraid that your coachman, finding we do not return, will suppose we have taken another road back, and that he will not follow the carriages belonging to the court?"

"Oh, there is no fear of that," said Fouquet; "when ever I place my coachman and my carriage in any partic-

ular spot, nothing but an express order from the king could stir them; and more than that, too, it seems that we are not the only ones who have come so far, for I hear footsteps and the sound of voices."

As he spoke, Fouquet turned round, and opened with his cane a mass of foliage which hid the path from his view. Aramis's glance as well as his own plunged at the same moment through the aperture he had made.

"A woman," said Aramis.

"And a man," said Fouquet.

"It is La Vallière and the king," they both exclaimed together.

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, "is his majesty aware of your cavern as well? I should not be astonished if he were, for he seems to be on very good terms with the dryads of Fontainebleau."

"Never mind," said Fouquet; "let us get there. If he is not aware of it, we shall see what he will do if he should know it, as it has two entrances, so that whilst he enters by one, we can leave by the other."

"Is it far?" asked Aramis, "for the rain is beginning to penetrate."

"We are there now," said Fouquet, as he pushed aside a few branches, and an excavation in the solid rock could be observed, hitherto concealed by heaths, ivy, and a thick covert of small shrubs.

Fouquet led the way, followed by Aramis; but as the latter entered the grotto, he turned round saying: "Yes, they are entering the wood; and, see, they are bending their steps this way."

"Very well; let us make room for them," said Fouquet, smiling and pulling Aramis by his cloak; "but I do not think the king knows of my grotto."

"Yes," said Aramis, "they are looking about them, but it is only for a thicker tree."

Aramis was not mistaken, the king's looks were directed upward, and not around him. He held La Vallière's arm within his own, and held her hand in his. La Vallière's feet began to slip on the damp grass. Louis again looked round him with greater attention than before, and perceiving an enormous oak with wide-spreading branches, he hurriedly drew La Vallière beneath its protecting shelter. The poor girl looked round her on all sides, and seemed half afraid, half desirous of being followed. The king made her lean her back against the trunk of the tree, whose vast circumference, protected by the thickness of the foliage, was as dry as if at that moment the rain had not been falling in torrents. He himself remained standing before her with his head uncovered. After a few minutes, however, some drops of rain penetrated through the branches of the tree and fell on the king's forehead, who did not pay any attention to them.

"Oh, sire!" murmured La Vallière, pushing the king's hat toward him. But the king simply bowed, and determinedly refused to cover his head.

"Now or never is the time to offer your place," said Fouquet in Aramis's ear.

"Now or never is the time to listen, and not lose a syllable of what they may have to say to each other," replied Aramis in Fouquet's ear.

In fact they both remained perfectly silent, and the king's voice reached them where they were.

"Believe me," said the king, "I perceive, or rather I can imagine your uneasiness; believe me I sincerely regret having isolated you from the rest of the company, and brought you, also, to a spot where you will be inconvenienced by the rain. You are wet already, and perhaps cold too?"

"No, sire."

"And yet you tremble?"

"I am afraid, sire, that my absence may be misinterpreted; at a moment, too, when all the others are reunited."

"I would not hesitate to propose returning to the carriages, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but pray look and listen, and tell me if it be possible to attempt to make the slightest progress at present?"

In fact the thunder was still rolling, and the rain continued to fall in torrents.

"Besides," continued the king, "no possible interpretation can be made which would be to your discredit. Are you not with the King of France; in other words, with the first gentleman of the kingdom?"

"Certainly, sire," replied La Vallière, "and it is a very distinguished honor for me; it is not, therefore, for myself that I fear any interpretations that may be made."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, sire."

"For *me*?" said the king, smiling, "I do not understand you."

"Has your majesty already forgotten what took place yesterday evening in her royal highness's apartments?"

"Oh! forget that, I beg, or allow me to remember it for no other purpose than to thank you once more for your letter, and——"

"Sire," interrupted La Vallière, "the rain is falling, and your majesty's head is uncovered."

"I entreat you not to think of anything but yourself."

"Oh! I," said La Vallière, smiling, "I am a country girl, accustomed to roaming through the meadows of the Loire and the gardens of Blois, whatever the weather may be. And, as for my clothes," she added, looking at her simple muslin dress, "your majesty sees there is but little room for injury."

"Indeed, I have already noticed, more than once, that

you owed nearly everything to yourself and nothing to your toilette. Your freedom from coquetry is one of your greatest charms in my eyes."

"Sire, do not make me out better than I am, and say merely, 'You cannot possibly be a coquette.'"

"Why so?"

"Because," said La Vallière, smiling, "I am not rich."

"You admit, then," said the king, quickly, "that you have a love for beautiful things."

"Sire, I only regard those things as beautiful which are within my reach. Everything which is too highly placed for me——"

"You are indifferent to?"

"Is foreign to me, as being prohibited."

"And I," said the king, "do not find that you are at my court on the footing you should be. The services of your family have not been sufficiently brought under my notice. The advancement of your family was cruelly neglected by my uncle."

"On the contrary, sire. His royal highness, the Duke of Orleans, was always exceedingly kind towards M. de Saint-Remy, my father-in-law. The services rendered were humble, and, properly speaking, our services have been adequately recognized. It is not every one who is happy enough to find opportunities of serving his sovereign with distinction. I have no doubt at all, that, if ever opportunities had been met with, my family's actions would have been as lofty as their loyalty was firm: but that happiness was never ours."

"In that case, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, it belongs to kings to repair the want of opportunity, and most delightfully do I undertake to repair, in your instance, and with the least possible delay, the wrongs of fortune towards you."

"Nay, sire," cried La Vallière, eagerly; "leave things, I beg, as they now are."

"Is it possible! you refuse what I ought, and what I wish to do for you?"

"All I desired has been granted me, when the honor was conferred upon me of forming one of Madame's household."

"But if you refuse for yourself, at least accept for your family."

"Your generous intentions, sire, bewilder me and make me apprehensive, for, in doing for my family what your kindness urges you to do, your majesty will raise up enemies for us, and enemies for yourself, too. Leave me in the ranks of middle-life, sire; of all the feelings and sentiments I experience, leave me to enjoy the pleasing instinct of disinterestedness."

"The sentiments you express," said the king, "are indeed admirable."

"Quite true," murmured Aramis in Fouquet's ear, "and he cannot be accustomed to them."

"But," replied Fouquet, "suppose she were to make a similar reply to my letter."

"True!" said Aramis, "let us not anticipate, but wait the conclusion."

"And then, dear Monsieur d'Herblay," added the superintendent, hardly able to appreciate the sentiments which La Vallière had just expressed, "it is very often sound calculation to seem disinterested with monarchs."

"Exactly what I was thinking this very minute," said Aramis. "Let us listen."

The king approached nearer to La Vallière, and as the rain dripped more and more through the foliage of the oak, he held his hat over the head of the young girl, who raised her beautiful blue eyes towards the royal hat which sheltered her, and shook her head, sighing deeply as she did so.

"What melancholy thought," said the king, "can possibly reach your heart when I place mine as a rampart before it?"

"I will tell you, sire. I had already once before broached this question, which is so difficult for a young girl of my age to discuss, but your majesty imposed silence on me. Your majesty belongs not to yourself alone: you are married; and every sentiment which would separate your majesty from the queen, in leading you to take notice of me, will be a source of the profoundest sorrow for the queen." The king endeavored to interrupt the young girl, but she continued with a suppliant gesture. "The Queen Maria, with an attachment which can be well understood, follows with her eyes every step of your majesty which separates you from her. Happy enough in having had her fate united to your own, she weepingly implores Heaven to preserve you to her, and is jealous of the faintest throb of your heart bestowed elsewhere." The king again seemed anxious to speak, but again did La Vallière venture to prevent him.—"Would it not, therefore, be a most blamable action," she continued, "if your majesty, a witness of this anxious and disinterested affection, gave the queen any cause for jealousy? Forgive me, sire, for the expressions I have used. I well know it is impossible, or rather that it would be impossible, that the greatest queen of the whole world could be jealous of a poor girl like myself. But though a queen, she is still a woman, and her heart, like that of the rest of her sex, cannot close itself against the suspicions which such as are evil disposed, insinuate. For heaven's sake, sire, think no more of me: I am unworthy of your regard."

"Do you not know that in speaking as you have done you change my esteem for you into the profoundest admiration?"

"Sire, you assume my words to be contrary to the

truth; you suppose me to be better than I really am, and attach a greater merit to me than God ever intended should be the case. Spare me, sire; for, did I not know that your majesty was the most generous man in your kingdom, I should believe you were jesting."

"You do not, I know, fear such a thing; I am quite sure of that," exclaimed Louis.

"I shall be obliged to believe it, if your majesty continues to hold such language towards me."

"I am most unhappy, then," said the king, in a tone of regret which was not assumed; "I am the unhappiest prince in the Christian world, since I am powerless to induce belief in my words, in one whom I love the best in the wide world, and who almost breaks my heart by refusing to credit my regard for her."

"Oh, sire!" said La Vallière, gently putting the king aside, who had approached nearer to her, "I think the storm has passed away now, and the rain has ceased." At the very moment, however, as the poor girl, fleeing as it were, from her own heart, which doubtless throbbed but too well in unison with the king's, uttered these words, the storm undertook to contradict her. A dead-white flash of lightning illumined the forest with a weird glare, and a peal of thunder, like a discharge of artillery, burst over their heads, as if the height of the oak that sheltered them had attracted the storm. The young girl could not repress a cry of terror. The king with one hand drew her towards his heart, and stretched the other above her head, as though to shield her from the lightning. A moment's silence ensued, as the group, delightful as everything young and loving is delightful, remained motionless, while Fouquet and Aramis contemplated it in attitudes as motionless as La Vallière and the king. "Oh, sire!" murmured La Vallière, "do you hear?" and her head fell upon his shoulder.

"Yes," said the king. "You see, the storm has not passed away."

"*It is a warning, sire.*" The king smiled. "Sire, it is the voice of Heaven in anger."

"Be it so," said the king. "I agree to accept that peal of thunder as a warning, and even as a menace, if, in five minutes from the present moment, it is renewed with equal violence; but if not, permit me to think that the storm is a storm simply, and nothing more." And the king, at the same moment, raised his head, as if to interrogate the heavens. But, as if the remark had been heard and accepted, during the five minutes which elapsed after the burst of thunder which had alarmed them, no renewed peal was heard; and, when the thunder was again heard, it was passing away as plainly as if, during those same five minutes, the storm, put to flight, had traversed the heavens with the wings of the wind. "Well, Louise," said the king, in a low tone of voice, "do you still threaten me with the anger of Heaven? and, since you wished to regard the storm as a warning, do you still believe it bodes misfortune?"

The young girl looked up, and saw that while they had been talking, the rain had penetrated the foliage above them, and was trickling down the king's face. "Oh, sire, sire!" she exclaimed, in accents of eager apprehension, which greatly agitated the king. "Is it for me," she murmured, "that the king remains thus uncovered, and exposed to the rain? What am I, then?"

"You are, you perceive," said the king, "the divinity who dissipates the storm, and brings back fine weather." In fact, even as the king spoke, a ray of sunlight streamed through the forest, and caused the rain-drops which rested upon the leaves, or fell vertically among the openings in the branches of the trees, to glisten like diamonds.

"Sire," said La Vallière, almost overcome, but making

a powerful effort over herself, "think of the anxieties your majesty will have to submit to on my account. At this very moment, they are seeking you in every direction. The queen must be full of uneasiness; and Madame—oh, Madame!" the young girl exclaimed, with an expression almost resembling terror.

This name had a certain effect upon the king. He started, and disengaged himself from La Vallière, whom he had, till that moment, held pressed against his heart. He then advanced towards the path, in order to look round, and returned, somewhat thoughtfully, to La Vallière. "Madame, did you say?" he remarked.

"Yes, Madame; she, too, is jealous," said La Vallière, with a marked tone of voice; and her eyes, so timorous in their expression, and so modestly fugitive in their glance, for a moment, ventured to look inquiringly into the king's.

"Still," returned Louis, making an effort over himself, "it seems to me that Madame has no reason, no right to be jealous of me."

"Alas!" murmured La Vallière.

"Are you, too," said the king, almost in a tone of reproach, "are you among those who think the sister has a right to be jealous of the brother?"

"It is not for me, sire, to seek to penetrate your majesty's secrets."

"You *do* believe it, then?" exclaimed the king.

"I believe Madame is jealous, sire," La Vallière replied, firmly.

"Is it possible," said the king, with some anxiety, "that you have perceived it, then, from her conduct towards you? Have her manners in any way been such towards you, that you can attribute them to the jealousy you speak of?"

"Not at all, sire; I am of so little importance."

"Oh! if it were really the case——" exclaimed Louis, violently.

"Sire," interrupted the young girl, "it has ceased raining; some one is coming, I think." And, forgetful of all etiquette, she had seized the king by the arm.

"Well," replied the king, "let them come. Who is there who would venture to think I had done wrong in remaining alone with Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"For pity's sake, sire! they will think it strange to see you wet through, in this manner, and that you should have run such risk for me."

"I have simply done my duty as a gentleman," said Louis; "and woe to him who may fail in his, in criticising his sovereign's conduct." In fact, at this moment, a few eager and curious faces were seen in the walk, as if engaged in a search. Catching glimpses at last of the king and La Vallière, they seemed to have found what they were seeking. They were some of the courtiers who had been sent by the queen and Madame, and uncovered themselves, in token of having perceived his majesty. But Louis, notwithstanding La Vallière's confusion, did not quit his respectful and tender attitude. Then, when all the courtiers were assembled in the walk—when every one had been able to perceive the extraordinary mark of deference with which he had treated the young girl, by remaining standing and bare-headed during the storm—he offered her his arm, led her towards the group who were waiting, recognized by an inclination of the head the respectful salutations which were paid him on all sides; and, still holding his hat in his hand, he conducted her to her carriage. And, as a few sparse drops of rain continued to fall—a last adieu of the vanishing storm—the other ladies, whom respect had prevented getting into their carriages before the king, remained altogether unprotected by hood or cloak, exposed to the rain from which

the king was protecting, as well as he was able, the humblest among them. The queen and Madame must, like the others, have witnessed this exaggerated courtesy of the king. Madame was so disconcerted at it, that she touched the queen with her elbow, saying at the same time, "Look there, look there."

The queen closed her eyes as if she had been suddenly seized with a fainting-spell. She lifted her hand to her face and entered her carriage, Madame following her. The king again mounted his horse, and without showing a preference for any particular carriage door, he returned to Fontainebleau, the reins hanging over his horse's neck, absorbed in thought. As soon as the crowd had disappeared, and the sound of the horses and carriages grew fainter in the distance, and when they were certain, in fact, that no one could see them, Aramis and Fouquet came out of their grotto, and both of them in silence passed slowly on towards the walk. Aramis looked most narrowly not only at the whole extent of the open space stretching out before and behind him, but even into the very depth of the wood.

"Monsieur Fouquet," he said, when he had quite satisfied himself that they were alone, "we must get back, at any cost, the letter you wrote to La Vallière."

"That will be easy enough," said Fouquet, "if my servant has not given it to her."

"In any case it must be had, do you understand?"

"Yes. The king is in love with this girl, you mean?"

"Deeply, and what is worse is, that on her side, the girl is passionately attached to him."

"As much as to say that we must change our tactics, I suppose?"

"Not a doubt of it; you have no time to lose. You must see La Vallière, and, without thinking any more of becoming her lover, which is out of the question, must

declare yourself her most devoted friend and her most humble servant."

"I will do so," replied Fouquet, "and without the slightest feeling of disinclination, for she seems a good-hearted girl."

"Or a very clever one," said Aramis; "but in that case, all the greater reason." Then he added, after a moment's pause, "If I am not mistaken, that girl will become the strongest passion of the king's life. Let us return to our carriage, and, as fast as possible, to the château."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOBY.

Two hours after the superintendent's carriage had set off by Aramis's directions, conveying them both towards Fontainebleau with the fleetness of the clouds the last breath of the tempest was hurrying across the face of heaven, La Vallière was closeted in her own apartment, with a simple muslin wrapper round her, having just finished a slight repast, which was placed upon a marble table. Suddenly the door was opened, and a servant entered to announce M. Fouquet, who had called to request permission to pay his respects to her. She made him repeat the message twice over, for the poor girl only knew M. Fouquet by name, and could not conceive what business she could possibly have with a superintendent of finances. However, as he might represent the king—and, after the conversation we have recorded it was very likely—she glanced at her mirror, drew out still more the ringlets of her hair, and desired him to be admitted. La Vallière could not, however, refrain from a certain feeling of un-

easiness. A visit from the superintendent was not an ordinary event in the life of any woman attached to the court. Fouquet, so notorious for his generosity, his gallantry, and his sensitive delicacy of feeling with regard to women generally, had received more invitations than he had requested audiences. In many houses, the presence of the superintendent had been significant of fortune; in many hearts, of love. Fouquet entered the apartment with a manner full of respect, presenting himself with that ease and gracefulness of manner which was the distinctive characteristic of the men of eminence of that period, and which at the present day seems no longer to be understood, even through the interpretation of the portraits of the period, in which the painter has endeavored to recall them to being. La Vallière acknowledged the ceremonious salutation which Fouquet addressed to her by a gentle inclination of the head, and motioned him to a seat. But Fouquet, with a bow, said, "I will not sit down until you have pardoned me."

"I?" asked La Vallière, "pardon what?"

Fouquet fixed a most piercing look upon the young girl, and fancied he could perceive in her face nothing but the most unaffected surprise. "I observe," he said, "that you have as much generosity as intelligence, and I read in your eyes the forgiveness I solicit. A pardon pronounced by your lips is insufficient for me, and I need the forgiveness of your heart and mind."

"Upon my honor, monsieur," said La Vallière, "I assure you most positively I do not understand your meaning."

"Again, that is a delicacy on your part which charms me," replied Fouquet, "and I see you do not wish me to blush before you."

"Blush! blush before *me*! Why should you blush?"

"Can I have deceived myself," said Fouquet; "and

can I have been happy enough not to have offended you by my conduct towards you?"

"Really, monsieur," said La Vallière, shrugging her shoulders, "you speak in enigmas, and I suppose I am too ignorant to understand you."

"Be it so," said Fouquet; "I will not insist. Tell me only, I entreat you, that I may rely upon your full and complete forgiveness."

"I have but only one reply to make to you, monsieur," said La Vallière, somewhat impatiently, "and I hope that will satisfy you. If I knew the wrong you have done me, I would forgive you, and I now do so with still greater reason since I am ignorant of the wrong you allude to."

Fouquet bit his lips, as Aramis would have done. "In that case," he said, "I may hope, that, notwithstanding what has happened, our good understanding will remain undisturbed, and that you will kindly confer the favor upon me of believing in my respectful friendship."

La Vallière fancied that she now began to understand, and said to herself, "I should not have believed M. Fouquet so eager to seek the source of a favor so very recent," and then added aloud, "Your friendship, monsieur! you offer me your friendship. The honor, on the contrary, is mine, and I feel overpowered by it."

"I am aware," replied Fouquet, "that the friendship of the master may appear more brilliant and desirable than that of the servant; but I assure you the latter will be quite as devoted, quite as faithful, and altogether disinterested."

La Vallière bowed, for, in fact, the voice of the superintendent seemed to convey both conviction and real devotion in its tone, and she held out her hand to him, saying, "I believe you."

Fouquet eagerly took hold of the young girl's hand.

"You see no difficulty, therefore," he added, "in restoring me that unhappy letter."

"What letter?" inquired La Vallière.

Fouquet interrogated her with his most searching gaze, as he had already done before, but the same ingenuous expression, the same transparently candid look met his. "I am obliged to confess," he said, after this denial, "that your heart is the most delicate in the world, and I should not feel I was a man of honor and uprightness if I were to suspect anything from a woman so generous as yourself."

"Really, Monsieur Fouquet," replied La Vallière, "it is with profound regret I am obliged to repeat that I absolutely understand nothing of what you refer to."

"In fact, then, upon your honor, mademoiselle, you have not received any letter from me?"

"Upon my honor, none," replied La Vallière, firmly.

"Very well, that is quite sufficient; permit me, then, to renew the assurance of my utmost esteem and respect," said Fouquet. Then, bowing, he left the room to seek Aramis, who was waiting for him in his own apartment, and leaving La Vallière to ask herself whether the superintendent had not lost his senses.

"Well!" inquired Aramis, who was impatiently waiting Fouquet's return, "are you satisfied with the favorite?"

"Enchanted," replied Fouquet; "she is a woman full of intelligence and fine feeling."

"She did not get angry, then?"

"Far from that—she did not even seem to understand."

"To understand what?"

"To understand that I had written to her."

"She must, however, have understood you sufficiently to give the letter back to you, for I presume she returned it."

"Not at all."

"At least, you satisfied yourself that she had burnt it."

"My dear Monsieur d'Herblay, I have been playing at cross-purposes for more than an hour, and, however amusing it may be, I begin to have had enough of this game. So understand me thoroughly: the girl pretended not to understand what I was saying to her; she denied having received any letter; therefore, having positively denied its receipt, she was unable either to return or burn it."

"Oh! oh!" said Aramis, with uneasiness, "what is this you tell me?"

"I say that she swore most positively she had not received any letter."

"That is too much. And did you not insist?"

"On the contrary, I did insist, almost impertinently even."

"And she persisted in her denial?"

"Unhesitatingly."

"And she did not contradict herself once?"

"Not once."

"But, in that case, then, you have left our letter in her hands?"

"How could I do otherwise?"

"Oh! it was a great mistake."

"What the deuce would you have done in my place?"

"One could not force her, certainly, but it is very embarrassing; such a letter ought not to remain in existence against us."

"Oh! the young girl's disposition is generosity itself; I looked at her eyes, and I can read eyes well."

"You think she can be relied upon?"

"From my heart I do."

"Well, I think we are mistaken."

"In what way?"

"I think that, in point of fact, as she herself told you, she did not receive the letter."

"What! do you suppose——"

"I suppose that, from some motive, of which we know nothing, your man did not deliver the letter to her."

Fouquet rang the bell. A servant appeared. "Send Toby here," he said. A moment afterwards a man made his appearance, with an anxious, restless look, shrewd expression of the mouth, with short arms, and his back somewhat bent. Aramis fixed a penetrating look upon him.

"Will you allow me to interrogate him myself?" inquired Aramis.

"Do so," said Fouquet.

Aramis was about to say something to the lackey, when he paused. "No," he said; "he would see that we attach too much importance to his answer; therefore question him yourself; I will pretend to be writing." Aramis accordingly placed himself at a table, his back turned towards the old attendant, whose every gesture and look he watched in a looking-glass opposite to him.

"Come here, Toby," said Fouquet to the valet, who approached with a tolerably firm step. "How did you execute my commission?" inquired Fouquet.

"In the usual way, monseigneur," replied the man.

"But how, tell me?"

"I succeeded in penetrating as far as Mademoiselle de la Vallière's apartment; but she was at mass, and so I placed the note on her toilette-table. Is not that what you told me to do?"

"Precisely; and is that all?"

"Absolutely all, monseigneur."

"No one was there?"

"No one."

"Did you conceal yourself as I told you?"

"Yes."

"And she returned?"

"Ten minutes afterwards."

"And no one could have taken the letter?"

"No one; for no one had entered the room."

"From the outside, but from the interior?"

"From the place where I was secreted, I could see to the very end of the room."

"Now listen to me," said Fouquet, looking fixedly at the lackey; "if this letter did not reach its proper destination, confess it; for, if a mistake has been made, your head shall be the forfeit."

Toby started, but immediately recovered himself. "Monseigneur," he said, "I placed the letter on the very place I told you: and I ask only half an hour to prove to you that the letter is in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand, or to bring you back the letter itself."

Aramis looked at the valet scrutinizingly. Fouquet was ready in placing confidence in people, and for twenty years this man had served him faithfully. "Go," he said; "but bring me the proof you speak of." The lackey quitted the room.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Fouquet of Aramis.

"I think that you must, by some means or another, assure yourself of the truth, either that the letter has or has not, reached La Vallière; that, in the first case, La Vallière must return it to you, or satisfy you by burning it in your presence; that, in the second, you must have the letter back again, even were it to cost you a million. Come, is not that your opinion?"

"Yes; but still, my dear bishop, I believe you are exaggerating the importance of the affair."

"Blind, how blind you are!" murmured Aramis.

"La Vallière," returned Fouquet, "whom we assume to be a schemer of the first ability, is simply nothing more than a coquette, who hopes that I shall pay my court to her, because I have already done so, and who, now that

she has received a confirmation of the king's regard, hopes to keep me in leading strings with the letter. It is natural enough."

Aramis shook his head.

"Is not that your opinion?" said Fouquet.

"She is not a coquette," he replied.

"Allow me to tell you——"

"Oh! I am well enough acquainted with women who are coquettes," said Aramis.

"My dear friend!"

"It is a long time ago since I finished my education, you mean. But women are the same, throughout the centuries."

"True; but men change, and you at the present day are far more suspicious than you formerly were." And then, beginning to laugh, he added, "Come, if La Vallière is willing to love me only to the extent of a third, and the king two-thirds, do you think the condition acceptable?"

Aramis rose impatiently. "La Vallière," he said "has never loved, and never will love, any one but the king."

"At all events," said Fouquet, "what would you do?"

"Ask me rather what I would have done?"

"Well! what would you have done?"

"in the first place, I should not have allowed that man to depart."

"Toby?"

"Yes; Toby is a traitor. Nay, I am sure of it, and I would not have let him go until he had told me the truth."

"There is still time. I will recall him, and do you question him in your turn."

"Agreed."

"But I assure you it is useless. He has been with me



RAOUL AND LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

for twenty years, and has never made the slightest mistake, and yet," added Fouquet, laughing, "it would have been easy enough for him to have done so."

"Still, call him back. This morning I fancy I saw that face, in earnest conversation with one of M. Colbert's men."

"Where was that?"

"Opposite the stables."

"Bah! all my people are at daggers drawn with that fellow."

"I saw him, I tell you, and his face, which should have been unknown to me when he entered just now, struck me as disagreeably familiar."

"Why did you not say something, then, while he was here?"

"Because it is only at this very minute that my memory is clear upon the subject."

"Really," said Fouquet, "you alarm me." And he again rang the bell.

"Provided that it is not already too late," said Aramis.

Fouquet once more rang impatiently. The valet usually in attendance appeared. "Toby!" said Fouquet, "send Toby." The valet again shut the door.

"You leave me at perfect liberty, I suppose?"

"Entirely so."

"I may employ all means, then to ascertain the truth."

"All."

"Intimidation, even?"

"I constitute you public prosecutor in my place."

They waited ten minutes longer, but uselessly, and Fouquet, thoroughly out of patience, again rang loudly.

"Toby!" he exclaimed.

"Monseigneur," said the valet, "they are looking for him."

"He cannot be far distant, I have not given him any commission to execute."

"I will go and see, monseigneur," replied the valet, as he closed the door. Aramis, during this interview, walked impatiently but without a syllable, up and down the cabinet. They waited a further ten minutes. Fouquet rang in a manner to alarm the very dead. The valet again presented himself, trembling in a way to induce a belief that he was the bearer of bad news.

"Monseigneur is mistaken," he said, before even Fouquet could interrogate him, "you must have given Toby some commission, for he has been to the stables and taken your lordship's swiftest horse, and saddled it himself."

"Well?"

"And he has gone off."

"Gone!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Let him be pursued. let him be captured."

"Nay, nay," whispered Aramis, taking him by the hand, "be calm, the evil is done."

The valet quietly went out.

"The evil is done, you say?"

"No doubt; I was sure of it. And now, let us give no cause for suspicion; we must calculate the result of the blow and ward it off, if possible."

"After all," said Fouquet, "the evil is not great."

"You think so?" said Aramis.

"Of course. Surely a man is allowed to write a love-letter to a woman."

"A man, certainly; a subject, no: especially, too, when the woman in question is one with whom the king is in love."

"But the king was not in love with La Vallière a week ago! he was not in love with her yesterday, and the letter is dated yesterday; I could not guess the king was in

love, when the king's affection was not even yet in existence."

"As you please," replied Aramis; "but unfortunately the letter is not dated, and it is that circumstance particularly which annoys me. If it had only been dated yesterday, I should not have the slightest shadow of uneasiness on your account."

Fouquet shrugged his shoulders.

"Am I not my own master," he said, "and is the king, then, king of my brain and of my flesh?"

"You are right," replied Aramis, "do not let us attach greater importance to matters than is necessary; and besides. . . . Well! if we are menaced, we have means of defense."

"Oh! menaced!" said Fouquet, "you do not place this gnat bite as it were, among the number of menaces which may compromise my fortune and my life, do you?"

"Do not forget, Monsieur Fouquet, that the bite of an insect can kill a giant, if the insect be venomous."

"But has this sovereign power you were speaking of, already vanished?"

"I am all-powerful, it is true, but I am not immortal."

"Come, then, the most pressing matter is to find Toby again, I suppose. Is not that your opinion?"

"Oh! as for that, you will not find him again," said Aramis, "and if he were of any great value to you, you must give him up for lost."

"At all events he is somewhere or another in the world," said Fouquet.

"You're right, let me act," replied Aramis.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MADAME'S FOUR CHANCES.

ANNE of Austria had begged the young queen to pay her a visit. For some time past suffering most acutely, and losing both her youth and beauty with that rapidity which signalizes the decline of women for whom life has been one long contest, Anne of Austria had, in addition to her physical sufferings, to experience the bitterness of being no longer held in any esteem, except as a surviving remembrance of the past, amidst the youthful beauties, wits, and influential forces of her court. Her physician's opinions, her mirror also, grieved her far less than the inexorable warnings which the society of the courtiers afforded, who, like rats in a ship, abandon the hold into which on the very next voyage the water will infallibly penetrate, owing to the ravages of decay. Anne of Austria did not feel satisfied with the time her eldest son devoted to her. The king, a good son, more from affection than from affectation, had at first been in the habit of passing an hour in the morning and one in the evening with his mother; but, since he had himself undertaken the conduct of state affairs, the duration of the morning and evening's visit had been reduced one half; and then, by degrees, the morning visit had been suppressed altogether. They met at mass; the evening visit was replaced by a meeting, either at the king's assembly or at Madame's, which the queen attended obligingly enough, out of regard to her two sons.

The result of this was, that Madame gradually acquired an immense influence over the court, which made her apartments the true royal place of meeting. This, Anne of Austria perceived; knowing herself to be very ill, and

condemned by her sufferings to frequent retirement, she was distressed at the idea that the greater part of her future days and evenings would pass away solitary, useless, and in despondency. She recalled with terror the isolation in which Cardinal Richelieu had formerly left her, those dreaded and insupportable evenings, during which, however, she had both youth and beauty, which are ever accompanied by hope, to console her. She next formed the project of transporting the court to her own apartments, and of attracting Madame, with her brilliant escort, to her gloomy and already sorrowful abode, where the widow of a king of France, and the mother of a king of France, was reduced to console, in her artificial widowhood, the weeping wife of a king of France.

Anne began to reflect. She had intrigued a good deal in her life. In the good times past, when her youthful mind nursed projects that were, ultimately, invariably successful, she had by her side to stimulate her ambition and her love, a friend of her own sex, more eager, more ambitious than herself,—a friend who had loved her, a rare circumstance at court, and whom some petty considerations had removed from her forever. But for many years past—except Madame de Motteville, and La Molena, her Spanish nurse, a *confidante* in her character of countrywoman and woman too—who could boast of having given good advice to the queen? Who, too, among all the youthful heads there, could recall the past for her,—that past in which alone she lived? Anne of Austria remembered Madame de Chevreuse, in the first place exiled rather by her wish than the king's, and then dying in exile, the wife of a gentleman of obscure birth and position. She asked herself what Madame de Chevreuse would have advised her to do in similar circumstances; and after serious reflection, it seemed as if the clever, subtle mind of her friend, full of experience

and sound judgment, answered her in the well remembered ironical tones: "All the insignificant young people are poor and greedy of gain. They require gold and incomes to supply means of amusement; it is by interest you must gain them over." And Anne of Austria adopted this plan. Her purse was well filled, and she had at her disposal a considerable sum of money, which had been amassed by Mazarin for her, and lodged in a place of safety. She possessed the most magnificent jewels in France, and especially pearls of a size so large that they made the king sigh every time he saw them, because the pearls of his crown were like millet seed compared to them. Anne of Austria had neither beauty nor charms any longer at her disposal. She gave out, therefore, that her wealth was great, and as an inducement for others to visit her apartments she let it be known that there were good gold crowns to be won at play, or that handsome presents were likely to be made on days when all went well with her; or windfalls, in the shape of annuities which she had wrung from the king by entreaty, and thus she determined to maintain her credit. In the first place, she tried these means upon Madame; because, to gain her consent was of more importance than anything else. Madame, notwithstanding the bold confidence with which her wit and beauty inspired her, blindly ran head foremost into the net thus stretched out to catch her. Enriched by degrees by these presents and transfers of property, she took a fancy to inheritances by anticipation. Anne of Austria adopted the same means towards Monsieur, and even towards the king himself. She instituted lotteries in her apartments. The day on which the present chapter opens, invitations had been issued for a late supper in the queen-mother's apartments, as she intended that two beautiful diamond bracelets of exquisite workmanship should be put into a lottery. The medal-

lions were antique cameos of the greatest value ; the diamonds, in point of intrinsic value, did not represent a very considerable amount, but the originality and rarity of the workmanship were such, that every one at court not only wished to possess the bracelets, but even to see the queen herself wear them ; for, on the days she wore them, it was considered as a favor to be admitted to admire them in kissing her hands. The courtiers had, even with regard to this subject, adopted various expressions of gallantry to establish the aphorism, that the bracelets would have been priceless in value if they had not been unfortunate enough to be placed in contact with arms as beautiful as the queen's. This compliment had been honored by a translation into all the languages of Europe, and numerous verses in Latin and French had been circulated on the subject. The day that Anne of Austria had selected for the lottery was a decisive moment ; the king had not been near his mother for a couple of days ; Madame, after the great scene of the Dryads and Naiads, was sulking by herself. It is true, the king's fit of resentment was over, but his mind was absorbingly occupied by a circumstance that raised him above the stormy disputes and giddy pleasures of the court.

Anne of Austria affected a diversion by the announcement of the famous lottery to take place in her apartments on the following evening. With this object in view she saw the young queen, whom, as we have already seen, she had invited to pay her a visit in the morning. "I have good news to tell you," she said to her ; "the king has been saying the most tender things about you. He is young, you know, and easily drawn away ; but so long as you keep near me, he will not venture to keep away from you, to whom, besides, he is most warmly and affectionately attached. I intend to have a lottery this evening and shall expect to see you."

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"I have heard," said the young queen, with a sort of timid reproach, "that your majesty intends to put in the lottery those lovely bracelets whose rarity is so great that we ought not to allow them to pass out of the custody of the crown, even were there no other reason than that they had once belonged to you."

"My daughter," said Anne of Austria, who read the young queen's thoughts, and wished to console her for not having received the bracelets as a present, "it is positively necessary that I should induce Madame to pass her time in my apartments."

"Madame!" said the young queen, blushing.

"Of course: would you not prefer to have a rival near you, whom you could watch and influence, to knowing that the king is with her always as ready to flirt as to be flirted with by her. The lottery I have proposed is my means of attraction for that purpose; do you blame me?"

"Oh no!" returned Maria Thérèse, clapping her hands with a child-like expression of delight.

"And you no longer regret, then, that I did not give you these bracelets, as I at first intended to do?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Very well; make yourself look as beautiful as possible, that our supper may be very brilliant; the gayer you seem, the more charming you appear, and you will eclipse all the ladies present as much by your brilliancy as by your rank."

Maria Theresa left full of delight. An hour afterwards, Anne of Austria received a visit from Madame, whom she covered with caresses, saying, "Excellent news! the king is charmed with my lottery."

"But I," replied Madame, "am not quite so greatly charmed; to see such beautiful bracelets on any one's arms but yours or mine, is what I cannot reconcile myself to."

"Well, well," said Anne of Austria, concealing by a smile a violent pang she had just experienced, "do not look at things in the worst light immediately."

"Ah, madame, fortune is blind, and I am told there are two hundred tickets."

"Quite as many as that; but you cannot surely forget that there can only be one winner."

"No doubt. But who will that be? Can you tell?" said Madame, in despair.

"You remind me that I had a dream last night; my dreams are always good,—I sleep so little."

"What was your dream?—but are you suffering?"

"No," said the queen, stifling with wonderful command the torture of a renewed attack of shooting pains in her bosom; "I dreamed that the king won the bracelets."

"The king!"

"You are going to ask me, I think, what the king could possibly do with the bracelets?"

"Yes."

"And you would not add, perhaps, that it would be very fortunate if the king were really to win, for he would be obliged to give the bracelets to some one else."

"To restore them to you, for instance."

"In which case I should immediately give them away; for you do not think, I suppose," said the queen, laughing, "that I have put these bracelets up to a lottery from necessity. My object was to give them without arousing any one's jealousy; but if fortune will not get me out of my difficulty—well, I will teach fortune a lesson—and I know very well to whom I intend to offer the bracelets." These words were accompanied by so expressive a smile, that Madame could not resist paying her by a grateful kiss.

"But," added Anne of Austria, "do you not know, as well as I do, that if the king were to win the bracelets, he would not restore them to me?"

"You mean he would give them to the queen?"

"No; and for the very same reason, that he would not give them back again to me; since, if I had wished to make the queen a present of them, I had no need of him for that purpose."

Madame cast a side glance upon the bracelets, which, in their casket, were dazzlingly exposed to view upon a table close beside her.

"How beautiful they are," she said, sighing. "But stay," Madame continued, "we are quite forgetting that your majesty's dream was nothing but a dream."

"I should be very much surprised," returned Anne of Austria, "if my dream were to deceive me; that has happened to me very seldom."

"We may look upon you as a prophetess, then."

"I have already said, that I dream but very rarely; but the coincidence of my dream about this matter, with my own ideas, is extraordinary! it agrees so wonderfully with my own views and arrangements."

"What arrangements do you allude to?"

"That you will get the bracelets, for instance."

"In that case, it will not be the king."

"Oh!" said Anne of Austria, "there is not such a very great distance between his majesty's heart and your own; for, are not you his sister, for whom he has a great regard? There is not, I repeat, so very wide a distance, that my dream can be pronounced false on that account. Come, let us reckon up the chances in its favor."

"I will count them."

"In the first place, we will begin with the dream. If the king wins, he is sure to give you the bracelets."

"I admit that is one."

"If you win them, they are yours."

"Naturally; that may be admitted also."

"Lastly;—if Monsieur were to win them!"

"Oh!" said Madame, laughing heartily, "he would give them to the Chevalier de Lorraine."

Anne of Austria laughed as heartily as her daughter-in-law; so, much so indeed, that her sufferings again returned, and made her turn suddenly pale in the very midst of her enjoyment.

"What is the matter?" inquired Madame, terrified.

"Nothing, nothing; a pain in my side. I have been laughing too much. We were at the fourth chance, I think."

"I cannot see a fourth."

"I beg your pardon; I am not excluded from the chance of winning, and if I be the winner, you are sure of me."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Madame.

"I hope you look upon yourself as one whose chances are good, and that my dream now begins to assume the solid outlines of reality."

"Yes, indeed: you give me both hope and confidence," said Madame, "and the bracelets, won in this manner, will be a hundred times more precious to me."

"Well! then, good-bye, until this evening." And the two princesses separated. Anne of Austria, after her daughter-in-law had left her, said to herself, as she examined the bracelets, "They are, indeed, precious; since, by their means, this evening, I shall have won over a heart to my side, and, at the same time, fathomed an important secret."

"Then turning towards the deserted recess in her room, she said, addressing vacancy—"Is it not thus that you would have acted, my poor Chevreuse? Yes, yes; I know it is."

And, like a perfume of other, fairer days, her youth, her imagination, and her happiness, seemed to be wafted towards the echo of this invocation.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LOTTERY.

By eight o'clock in the evening, every one had assembled in the queen-mother's apartments. Anne of Austria, in full dress, beautiful still, from former loveliness, and from all the resources coquetry can command at the hands of clever assistants, concealed, or rather pretended to conceal, from the crowd of courtiers who surrounded her, and who still admired her, thanks to the combination of circumstances which we have indicated in the preceding chapter, the ravages, which were already visible, of the acute suffering to which she finally yielded a few years later. Madame, almost as great a coquette as Anne of Austria, and the queen, simple and natural as usual, were seated beside her, each contending for her good graces. The ladies of honor, united in a body, in order to resist with greater effect and consequently with more success, the witty and lively conversations which the young men held about them, were enabled, like a battalion formed in square, to offer each other the means of attack and defense which were thus at their command. Montalais, learned in that species of warfare which consists of sustained skirmishing, protected the whole line by a sort of rolling fire she directed against the enemy. Saint-Aignan, in utter despair at the rigor, which became almost insulting, from the very fact of her persisting in it, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente displayed, tried to turn his back upon her; but, overcome by the irresistible brilliancy of her eyes, he, every moment, returned to consecrate his defeat by new submissions, to which Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not fail to reply by fresh acts of

impertinence. Saint-Aignan did not know which way to turn. La Vallière had about her, not exactly a court, but sprinklings of courtiers. Saint-Aignan, hoping by this maneuver to attract Athenais's attention towards him, approached the young girl, and saluted her with a respect that induced some to believe that he wished to balance Athenais by Louise. But these were persons who had neither been witnesses of the scene during the shower, nor had heard it spoken of. As the majority was already informed, and well informed too, on the matter, the acknowledged favor with which she was regarded had attracted to her side some of the most astute, as well as the least sensible, members of the court. The former, because they said with Montaigne, "How do I know?" and the latter, who said with Rabelais, "Perhaps." The greatest number had followed in the wake of the latter, just as in hunting five or six of the best hounds alone follow the scent of the animal hunted, whilst the remainder of the pack follow only the scent of the hounds. The two queens and Madame examined with particular attention the toilettes of their ladies and maids of honor; and they condescended to forget they were queens in recollecting that they were women. In other words, they pitilessly picked to pieces every person present who wore a petticoat. The looks of both princesses simultaneously fell upon La Vallière, who, as we have just said, was completely surrounded at that moment. Madame knew not what pity was, and said to the queen-mother, as she turned towards her, "If fortune were just, she would favor that poor La Vallière."

"That is not possible," said the queen-mother, smiling.

"Why not?"

"There are only two hundred tickets, so that it was not possible to inscribe every one's name on the list."

"And hers is not there, then?"

"No!"

"What a pity! she might have won them, and then sold them."

"Sold them!" exclaimed the queen.

"Yes; it would have been a dowry for her, and she would not have been obliged to marry without her *trousseau*, as will probably be the case."

"Really," answered the queen-mother, "poor little thing: has she no dresses, then?"

And she pronounced these words like a woman who has never been able to understand the inconveniences of a slenderly-filled purse.

"Stay, look at her. Heaven forgive me, if she is not wearing the very same petticoat this evening that she had on this morning during the promenade, and which she managed to keep clean, thanks to the care the king took of her, in sheltering her from the rain."

At the very moment Madame uttered these words the king entered the room. The two queens would not perhaps have observed his arrival, so completely were they occupied in their ill-natured remarks, had not Madame noticed that, all at once, La Vallière, who was standing up facing the gallery, exhibited certain signs of confusion, and then said a few words to the courtiers who surrounded her, who immediately dispersed. This movement induced Madame to look towards the door, and at that moment, the captain of the guards announced the king. At this moment La Vallière, who had hitherto kept her eyes fixed upon the gallery, suddenly cast them down as the king entered. His majesty was dressed magnificently and in the most perfect taste; he was conversing with Monsieur and the Duc de Roquelaure, Monsieur on his right and the Duc de Roquelaure on his left. The king advanced, in the first place, towards the queens, to whom he bowed with an air full of graceful respect. He took

his mother's hand and kissed it, addressed a few compliments to Madame upon the beauty of her toilette, and then began to make the round of the assembly. La Vallière was saluted in the same manner as the others, but with neither more nor less attention. His majesty then returned to his mother and his wife. When the courtiers noticed that the king had only addressed some ordinary remark to the young girl who had been so particularly noticed in the morning, they immediately drew their own conclusion to account for this coldness of manner; this conclusion being, that although the king may have taken a sudden fancy to her, that fancy had already disappeared. One thing, however, must be remarked, that close beside La Vallière, among the number of the courtiers, M. Fouquet was to be seen; and his respectfully attentive manner served to sustain the young girl in the midst of the varied emotions that visibly agitated her.

M. Fouquet was just on the point, moreover, of speaking in a more friendly manner with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when M. de Colbert approached, and after having bowed to Fouquet with all the formality of respectful politeness, he seemed to take up a post beside La Vallière, for the purpose of entering into conversation with her. Fouquet immediately quitted his place. These proceedings were eagerly devoured by the eyes of Montalais and Malicorne, who mutually exchanged their observations on the subject. De Guiche, standing within the embrasure of one of the windows, saw no one but Madame. But as Madame, on her side, frequently glanced at La Vallière, De Guiche's eyes following Madame's were from time to time cast upon the young girl. La Vallière instinctively felt herself sinking beneath the weight of all these different looks, inspired, some by interest, others by envy. She had nothing to compensate her for her sufferings, not a kind word from her companions, nor a look of affection.

from the king. No one could possibly express the misery the poor girl was suffering. The queen-mother next directed the small table to be brought forward, on which the lottery-tickets were placed, two hundred in number, and begged Madame de Motteville to read the list of the names. It was a matter of course that this list had been drawn out in strict accordance with the laws of etiquette. The king's name was first on the list, next the queen-mother, then the queen, Monsieur, Madame, and so on. All hearts throbbed anxiously as the list was read out; more than three hundred persons had been invited, and each of them was anxious to learn whether his or her name was to be found in the number of privileged names. The king listened with as much attention as the others, and when the last name had been pronounced, he noticed that La Vallière had been omitted from the list. Every one, of course, remarked this omission. The king flushed as if much annoyed; but La Vallière, gentle, and resigned, as usual, exhibited nothing of the sort. While the list was being read, the king had not taken his eyes off the young girl, who seemed to expand, as it were, beneath the happy influence she felt was shed around her, and who was delighted and too pure in spirit for any other thought than that of love to find an entrance either to her mind or her heart. Acknowledging this touching self-denial by the fixity of his attention, the king showed La Vallière how much he appreciated its delicacy. When the list was finished, the different faces of those who had been omitted or forgotten, fully expressed their disappointment. Malicorne also was left out from amongst the men; and the grimace he made plainly said to Montalais, who was also forgotten, "Cannot we contrive to arrange matters with fortune in such a manner that she shall not forget us?" to which a smile full of intelligence from Mademoiselle Aure, replied: "Certainly we can."

The tickets were distributed to each according to the number listed. The king received his first, next the queen-mother, then Monsieur, then the queen and Madame, and so on. After this, Anne of Austria opened a small Spanish leather bag, containing two hundred numbers engraved upon small balls of mother-of-pearl, and presented the open sack to the youngest of her maids of honor, for the purpose of taking one of the balls out of it. The eager expectation of the throng, amidst all the tediously slow preparations, was rather that of cupidity than curiosity. Saint-Aignan bent towards Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente to whisper to her, "Since we have each a number, let us unite our two chances. The bracelet shall be yours if I win, and if you are successful, deign to give me but one look of your beautiful eye."

"No," said Athenais, "if you win the bracelet keep it; every one for himself."

"You are without any pity," said Saint-Aignan, "and I will punish you by a quatrain:—

" 'Beautiful Iris, to my vow
You are too opposed——"

"Silence," said Athenais, "you will prevent me hearing the winning number."

"Number one," said the young girl who had drawn the mother-of-pearl from the Spanish leather bag.

"The king!" exclaimed the queen-mother.

"The king has won," repeated the queen, delightedly.

"Oh! the king! your dream!" said Madame, joyously, in the ear of Anne of Austria.

The king was the only one who did not exhibit any satisfaction. He merely thanked Fortune for what she had done for him, in addressing a slight salutation to the young girl who had been chosen as her proxy. Then receiving from the hands of Anne of Austria, amid the

eager desire of the whole assembly, the casket inclosing the bracelets, he said, "Are these bracelets really beautiful, then?"

"Look at them," said Anne of Austria, "and judge for yourself."

The king looked at them, and said, "Yes, indeed, an admirable medallion. What perfect finish!"

"What perfect finish!" repeated Madame.

Queen Maria Theresa easily saw, and that, too, at the very first glance, that the king would not offer the bracelets to her; but, as he did not seem the least degree in the world disposed to offer them to Madame, she felt almost satisfied, or nearly so. The king sat down. The most intimate among the courtiers approached, one by one, for the purpose of admiring more closely the beautiful piece of workmanship, which soon, with the king's permission, was handed about from person to person. Immediately, every one, connoisseurs or not, uttered various exclamations of surprise, and overwhelmed the king with congratulations. There was, in fact, something for everybody to admire—the brilliants for some, and the cutting for others. The ladies present visibly displayed their impatience to see such a treasure monopolized by the gentlemen.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the king, whom nothing escaped, "one would almost think that you wore bracelets as the Sabines used to do; hand them round for a while for the inspection of the ladies, who seem to me to have, and with far greater right, an excuse for understanding such matters!"

These words appeared to Madame the commencement of a decision she expected. She gathered, besides, this happy belief from the glances of the queen-mother. The courtier who held them at the moment the king made this remark, amidst the general agitation, hastened to place

the bracelets in the hands of the queen, Maria Theresa, who, knowing too well, poor woman, that they were not designed for her, hardly looked at them, and almost immediately passed them on to Madame. The latter, and even more minutely, Monsieur, gave the bracelets a long look of anxious and almost covetous desire. She then handed the jewels to those ladies who were near her, pronouncing this single word, but with an accent which was worth a long phrase, "Magnificent!"

The ladies who had received the bracelets from Madame's hands looked at them as long as they chose to examine them, and then made them circulate by passing them on towards the right. During this time the king was tranquilly conversing with De Guiche and Fouquet, rather passively letting them talk than himself listening. Accustomed to the set form of ordinary phrases, his ear, like that of all men who exercise an incontestable superiority over others, merely selected from the conversations held in various directions, the indispensable word which requires reply. His attention, however, was now elsewhere, for it wandered as his eyes did.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was the last of the ladies inscribed for tickets; and, as if she had ranked according to her name upon the list, she only had Montalais and La Vallière near her. When the bracelets reached these two latter no one appeared to take any further notice of them. The humble hands which for a moment touched these jewels, deprived them for the time, of their importance—a circumstance which did not, however, prevent Montalais from starting with joy, envy, and covetous desire, at the sight of the beautiful stones still more than at their magnificent workmanship. It is evident that if she were compelled to decide between the pecuniary value and the artistic beauty, Montalais would unhesitatingly have preferred diamonds to cameos, and her disinclination,

therefore, to pass them to her companion, La Vallière, was very great. La Vallière fixed a look almost of indifference upon the jewels.

"Oh, how beautiful, how magnificent these bracelets are!" exclaimed Montalais; "and yet you do not go into ecstasies about them, Louise! You are no true woman, I am sure."

"Yes, I am indeed," replied the young girl, with an accent of the most charming melancholy; "but why desire that which can never, by any possibility, be ours?"

The king, his head bent forward, was listening to what Louise was saying. Hardly had the vibration of her voice reached his ear than he rose, radiant with delight, and passing across the whole assembly, from the place where he stood, to La Vallière, "You are mistaken, mademoiselle," he said, "you are a woman, and every woman has a right to wear jewels, which are a woman's appurtenance."

"Oh, sire!" said La Vallière, "your majesty will not absolutely believe in my modesty?"

"I believe you possess every virtue, mademoiselle; frankness as well as every other; I entreat you, therefore, to say frankly what you think of these bracelets?"

"That they are beautiful, sire, and cannot be offered to any other than a queen."

"I am delighted that such is your opinion, mademoiselle; the bracelets are yours, and the king begs your acceptance of them."

And as, with a movement almost resembling terror, La Vallière eagerly held out the casket to the king, the king gently pushed back her trembling hand.

A silence of astonishment, more profound than that of death, reigned in the assembly.

And yet, from the side where the queens were, no one had heard what he had said, nor understood what he had done. A charitable friend, however, took upon herself to

spread the news; it was Tonnay-Charente, to whom Madame had made a sign to approach.

"Good heavens!" explained Tonnay-Charente, "how happy that La Vallière is! the king has just given her the bracelets."

Madame bit her lips to such a degree that the blood appeared upon the surface of the skin. The young queen looked first at La Vallière and then at Madame, and began to laugh. Anne of Austria rested her chin upon her beautiful white hand, and remained for a long time absorbed by a presentiment that disturbed her mind, and by a terrible pang which stung her heart. De Guiche, observing Madame turn pale, and guessing the cause of her change of color, abruptly quitted the assembly and disappeared. Malicorne was then able to approach Montalais very quietly, and under cover of the general din of conversation, said to her:

"Aure, your fortune and our future are standing at your elbow."

"Yes," was her reply, as she tenderly embraced La Vallière, whom, inwardly, she was tempted to strangle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MALAGA.

DURING all these long and noisy debates between the opposite ambitions of politics and love, one of our characters, perhaps the one least deserving of neglect, was, however, very much neglected, very much forgotten, and exceedingly unhappy. In fact, D'Artagnan,—D'Artagnan we say, for we must call him by his name, to remind our readers of his existence—D'Artagnan, we repeat, had absolutely nothing whatever to do, amidst these brilliant but-

terflies of fashion. After following the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, and critically observing the various pastoral fancies and heroi-comic transformations of his sovereign, the musketeer felt that he needed something more than this to satisfy the cravings of his nature. At every moment assailed by people asking him, "How do you think this costume suits me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he would reply to them in quiet, sarcastic tones, "Why, I think you are quite as well-dressed as the best-dressed monkey to be found in the fair at Saint Laurent." It was just such a compliment D'Artagnan would choose where he did not feel disposed to pay any other: and, whether agreeable or not, the inquirer was obliged to be satisfied with it. Whenever any one asked him, "How do you intend to dress yourself this evening?" he replied, "I shall undress myself;" at which the ladies all laughed, and a few of them blushed. But after a couple of days passed in this manner, the musketeer, perceiving that nothing serious was likely to arise which would concern him, and that the king had completely, or, at least, appeared to have completely, forgotten Paris, Saint Mandé, and Belle-Isle—that M. Colbert's mind was occupied with illuminations and fireworks—that for the next month, at least, the ladies had plenty of glances to bestow, and also to receive in exchange—D'Artagnan asked the king for leave of absence for a matter of private business. At the moment D'Artagnan made his request, his majesty was on the point of going to bed, quite exhausted from dancing.

"You wish to leave me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" inquired the king, with an air of astonishment; for Louis XIV. could never understand that any one who had the distinguished honor of being near him, could wish to leave him.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I leave you simply because I am not of the slightest service to you in anything. Ah!

if I could only hold the balancing-pole while you were dancing, it would be a very different affair."

"But, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, gravely, "people dance without balancing-poles."

"Ah! indeed," said the musketeer, continuing his imperceptible tone of irony, "I had no idea such a thing was possible."

"You have not seen me dance, then?" inquired the king.

"Yes; but I always thought dancers went from easy to difficult acrobatic feats. I was mistaken; all the more greater reason, therefore, that I should leave for a time. Sire, I repeat, you have no present occasion for my services; besides, if your majesty should have any need of me, you would know where to find me."

"Very well," said the king, and he granted him leave of absence.

We shall not look for D'Artagnan, therefore, at Fontainebleau, for to do so would be useless; but, with the permission of our readers, follow him to the Rue des Lombards, where he was located at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, in the house of our old friend Planchet. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the weather was exceedingly warm; there was only one window open, and that one belonging to a room on the *entresol*. A perfume of spices, mingled with another perfume less exotic, but more penetrating, namely, that which arose from the street, ascended to salute the nostrils of the musketeer. D'Artagnan, reclining in an immense straight-backed chair, with his legs not stretched out, but simply placed upon a stool, formed an angle of the most obtuse form that could possibly be seen. Both his arms were crossed over his head, his head reclining upon his left shoulder, like Alexander the Great. His eyes, usually so quick and intelligent in their expression, were now half-closed, and

seemed fastened, as it were, upon a small corner of blue sky, that was visible behind the opening of the chimneys ; there was just enough blue, and no more, to fill one of the sacks of lentils, or haricots, which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor. Thus extended at his ease, and sheltered in his place of observation behind the window, D'Artagnan seemed as if he had ceased to be a soldier, as if he were no longer an officer belonging to the palace, but was, on the contrary, a quiet, easy-going citizen in a state of stagnation between his dinner and supper, or between his supper and his bed ; one of those strong, ossified brains, which have no more room for a single idea, so fiercely does animal matter keep watch at the doors of intelligence, narrowly inspecting the contraband trade which might result from the introduction into the brain of a symptom of thought. We have already said night was closing in, the shops were being lighted, while the windows of the upper apartments were being closed, and the rhythmic steps of a patrol of soldiers forming the night watch could be heard retreating. D'Artagnan continued, however, to think of nothing, except the blue corner of the sky. A few paces from him, completely in the shade, lying on his stomach, upon a sack of Indian corn, was Planchet, with both his arms under his chin, and his eyes fixed on D'Artagnan, who was either thinking, dreaming, or sleeping, with his eyes open. Planchet had been watching him for a tolerably long time, and, by way of interruption, he began by exclaiming, "Hum ! hum !" But D'Artagnan did not stir. Planchet then saw that it was necessary to have recourse to more effectual means still : after a prolonged reflection on the subject, the most ingenious means that suggested itself to him under present circumstances, was to let himself roll off the sack on to the floor, murmuring, at the same time, against himself, the word "stupid." But, notwithstand-

ing the noise produced by Planchet's fall, D'Artagnan, who had in the course of his existence heard many other, and very different falls, did not appear to pay the least attention to the present one. Besides, an enormous cart, laden with stones, passing from the Rue Saint-Médéric, absorbed, in the noise of its wheels, the noise of Planchet's tumble. And yet Planchet fancied that, in token of tacit approval, he saw him imperceptibly smile at the word "stupid." This emboldened him to say, "Are you asleep, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"No, Planchet, I am not *even* asleep," replied the musketeer.

"I am in despair," said Planchet, "to hear such a word as *even*."

"Well, and why not; is it not a grammatical word, Monsieur Planchet?"

"Of course, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well!"

"Well, then, the word distresses me beyond measure."

"Tell me why you are distressed, Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"If you say that you are not *even* asleep, it is as much as to say that you have not even the consolation of being able to sleep; or, better still, it is precisely the same as telling me that you are getting bored to death."

"Planchet, you know I am never bored."

"Except to-day, and the day before yesterday."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, it is a week since you returned here from Fontainebleau; in other words, you have no longer your orders to issue, or your men to review and maneuver. You need the sound of guns, drums, and all that din and confusion; I who have myself carried a musket, can easily believe that."

"Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, "I assure you I am not bored the least in the world."

"In that case, what are you doing, lying there, as if you were dead?"

"My dear Planchet, there was, once upon a time, at the siege of Rochelle, when I was there, when you were there, when we both were there, a certain Arab, who was celebrated for the manner in which he adjusted culverins. He was a clever fellow, although of a very odd complexion, which was the same color as your olives. Well, this Arab, whenever he had done eating or working, used to sit down to rest himself, as I am resting myself now, and smoked I cannot tell you what sort of magical leaves, in a large amber-mouthed tube; and if any officers, happening to pass, reproached him for being always asleep, he used quietly to reply: 'Better to sit down than to stand up, to lie down than to sit down, to be dead than to lie down.' He was an acutely melancholy Arab, and I remember him perfectly well, from the color of his skin, and the style of his conversation. He used to cut off the heads of Protestants with the most singular gusto!"

"Precisely; and then used to embalm them, when they were worth the trouble; and when he was thus engaged with his herbs and plants about him, he looked like a basket-maker making baskets."

"You are quite right, Planchet, he did."

"Oh! I can remember things very well, at times!"

"I have no doubt of it; but what do you think of his mode of reasoning?"

"I think it good in one sense, but very stupid in another."

"Expound your meaning, M. Planchet."

"Well, monsieur, in point of fact then, 'better to sit down than to stand up,' is plain enough, especially when one may be fatigued," and Planchet smiled in a roguish

way; "as for 'better to be lying down,' let that pass, but as for the last proposition, that it is 'better to be dead than alive,' it is, in my opinion, very absurd, my own undoubted preference being for my bed; and if you are not of my opinion, it is simply, as I have already had the honor of telling you, because you are boring yourself to death."

"Planchet, do you know M. La Fontaine?"

"The chemist at the corner of the Rue Saint-Médéric?"

"No, the writer of fables."

"Oh! *Maître Corbeau*!"

"Exactly; well, then, I am like his hare."

"He has got a hare also, then?"

"He has all sorts of animals."

"Well, what does his hare do, then?"

"M. La Fontaine's hare thinks."

"Ah, ha!"

"Planchet, I am like that hare—I am thinking."

"You are thinking, you say?" said Planchet, uneasily.

"Yes; your house is dull enough to drive people to think; you will admit that, I hope."

"And yet, monsieur, you have a look-out upon the street."

"Yes; and wonderfully interesting that is, of course."

"But it is no less true, monsieur, that, if you were living at the back of the house, you would bore yourself—I mean, you would think—more than ever."

"Upon my word, Planchet, I hardly know that."

"Still," said the grocer, "if your reflections are at all like those which led you to restore King Charles II.;" and Planchet finished by a little laugh which was not without its meaning.

"Ah! Planchet, my friend," returned D'Artagnan, "you are getting ambitious."

"Is there no other king to be restored, M. d'Artagnan —no second Monk to be packed up, like a salted hog, in a deal box?"

"No, my dear Planchet; all the kings are seated on their respective thrones; less comfortably so, perhaps, than I am upon this chair; but, at all events, there they are." And D'Artagnan sighed deeply.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you are making me very uneasy."

"You are very good, Planchet."

"I begin to suspect something."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are getting thin."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, striking his chest, which sounded like an empty cuirass; "it is impossible, Planchet."

"Ah!" said Planchet, slightly overcome; "if you were to get thin in my house——"

"Well?"

"I should do something rash."

"What would you do? Tell me."

"I should look out for the man who was the cause of all your anxieties."

"Ah! according to your account, I am anxious now."

"Yes, you are anxious; and you are getting thin, visibly getting thin. *Malaga!* if you go on getting thin in this way, I will take my sword in my hand, and go straight to M. d'Herblay, and have it out with him."

"What!" said M. d'Artagnan, starting in his chair; "what's that you say? And what has M. d'Herblay's name to do with your groceries?"

"Just as you please. Get angry if you like, or call me names, if you prefer it; but, the deuce is in it. *I know what I know.*"

D'Artagnan had, during this second outburst of Plan-

chet's, so placed himself as not to lose a single look of his face; that is, he sat with both his hands resting on both his knees, and his head stretched out towards the grocer. "Come, explain yourself," he said, "and tell me how you could possibly utter such a blasphemy. M. d'Herblay, your old master, my friend, an ecclesiastic, a musketeer turned bishop—do you mean to say you would raise your sword against him, Planchet?"

"I could raise my sword against my own father, when I see you in such a state as you are now."

"M. d'Herblay, a gentleman!"

"It's all the same to me whether he's a gentleman or not. He gives you the blue devils, that is all I know. And the blue devils make people get thin. *Malaga!* I have no notion of M. D'Artagnan leaving my house thinner than when he entered it."

"How does he give me the blue devils, as you call it? Come, explain, explain."

"You have had the nightmare during the last three nights."

"I?"

"Yes, you; and in your nightmare you called out, several times, 'Aramis, deceitful Aramis!'"

"Ah! I said that, did I?" murmured D'Artagnan uneasily.

"Yes, those very words, upon my honor."

"Well, what else? You know the saying, Planchet, 'dreams go by contraries.'"

"Not so; for, every time during the last three days, when you went out, you have not once failed to ask me, on your return, 'Have you seen M. d'Herblay?' or else 'Have you received any letters for me from M. d'Herblay?'"

"Well, it is very natural I should take an interest in my old friend," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; but not to such an extent as to get thin on that account."

"Planchet, I'll get fatter; I give you my word of honor I will."

"Very well, monsieur, I accept it; for I know that when you give your word of honor, it is sacred."

"I will not dream of Aramis any more; and I will never ask you again if there are any letters from M. d'Herblay; but on condition that you explain one thing to me."

"Tell me what it is, monsieur."

"I am a great observer; and just now, you made use of a very singular oath, which is unusual for you."

"You mean *Malaga*! I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"It is the oath I have used ever since I have been a grocer."

"Very proper, too, it is the name of a dried grape, or raisin, I believe?"

"It is my most ferocious oath; when I have once said *Malaga*! I am a man no longer."

"Still, I never knew you use that oath before."

"Very likely not, monsieur. I had a present made me of it," said Planchet; and, as he pronounced these words, he winked his eye with a cunning expression, which thoroughly awakened D'Artagnan's attention.

"Come, come, M. Planchet."

"Why, I am not like you, monsieur," said Planchet. "I don't pass my life in thinking."

"You do wrong, then."

"I mean in boring myself to death. We have but a very short time to live—why not make the best of it?"

"You are an Epicurean philosopher, I begin to think, Planchet."

"Why not? My hand is still as steady as ever; I can

write, and can weigh out my sugar and spices; my foot is firm; I can dance and walk about; my stomach has its teeth still, for I eat and digest well; my heart is not quite hardened. Well, monsieur?"

"Well, what, Planchet?"

"Why, you see——" said the grocer, rubbing his hands together.

D'Artagnan crossed one leg over the other, and said, "Planchet, my friend, I am unnerved with extreme surprise; for you are revealing yourself to me under a perfectly new light."

Planchet, flattered in the highest degree by this remark, continued to rub his hands very hard together. "Ah, ah," he said, "because I happen to be only slow, you think me, perhaps, a positive fool."

"Very good, Planchet; very well reasoned."

"Follow my idea, monsieur, if you please. I said to myself," continued Planchet, "that, without enjoyment, there is no happiness on this earth."

"Quite true, what you say, Planchet," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"At all events, if we cannot obtain pleasure—for pleasure is not so common a thing, after all—let us, at least, get consolations of some kind or other."

"And so you console yourself?"

"Exactly so."

"Tell me how you console yourself."

"I put on a buckler for the purpose of confronting *ennui*. I place my time at the direction of patience; and on the very eve of feeling I am going to get bored, I amuse myself."

"And you don't find any difficulty in that?"

"None."

"And you found it out quite by yourself?"

"Quite so."

"It is miraculous."

"What do you say?"

"I say, that your philosophy is not to be matched in the Christian or pagan world, in modern days or in antiquity!"

"You think so?—follow my example, then."

"It is a very tempting one."

"Do as I do."

"I could not wish for anything better; but all minds are not of the same stamp; and it might possibly happen that if I were required to amuse myself in the manner you do, I should bore myself horribly."

"Bah! at least try first."

"Well, tell me what you do."

"Have you observed that I leave home occasionally?"

"Yes."

"In any particular way?"

"Periodically."

"That's the very thing. You have noticed it, then?"

"My dear Planchet, you must understand that when people see each other every day, and one of the two absents himself, the other misses him. Do not you feel the want of my society when I am in the country?"

"Prodigiously; that is to say, I feel like a body without a soul."

"That being understood, then, proceed."

"What are the periods when I absent myself?"

"On the fifteenth and thirtieth of every month."

"And I remain away?"

"Sometimes two, sometimes three, and sometimes four days at a time."

"Have you ever given it a thought, why I was absent?"

"To look after your debts, I suppose."

"And when I returned, how did you think I looked, as far as my face was concerned?"

"Exceedingly self-satisfied."

"You admit, you say, that I always look satisfied. And what have you attributed my satisfaction to?"

"That your business was going on very well; that your purchases of rice, prunes, raw sugar, dried apples, pears, and treacle, were advantageous. You were always very picturesque in your notions and ideas, Planchet; and I was not in the slightest degree surprised to find you had selected grocery as an occupation, which is of all trades the most varied, and the very pleasantest, as far as character is concerned; inasmuch as one handles so many natural and perfumed productions."

"Perfectly true, monsieur; but you are very greatly mistaken."

"In what way?"

"In thinking that I leave here every fortnight, to collect my money, or to make purchases. Ho, ho! how could you possibly have thought such a thing? Ho, ho, ho!" And Planchet began to laugh in a manner that inspired D'Artagnan with very serious misgivings as to his sanity.

"I confess," said the musketeer, "that I do not precisely catch your meaning."

"Very true, monsieur."

"What do you mean by 'very true'?"

"It must be true, since you say it; but pray, be assured that it in no way lessens my opinion of you."

"Ah, that is lucky."

"No; you are a man of genius; and whenever the question happens to be of war, tactics, surprises, or good honest blows to be dealt, why, kings are marionettes, compared to you. But for the consolations of the mind, the proper care of the body, the agreeable things of life, if one may say so—ah! monsieur don't talk to me about men of genius; they are nothing short of executioners."

"Good," said D'Artagnan, really fidgety with curiosity, "upon my word you interest me in the highest degree."

"You feel already less bored than you did just now, do you not?"

"I was not bored; yet since you have been talking to me, I feel more animated."

"Very good, then; that is not a bad beginning. I will cure you, rely upon that."

"There is nothing I should like better."

"Will you let me try, then?"

"Immediately, if you like."

"Very well. Have you any horses here?"

"Yes; ten, twenty, thirty."

"Oh, there is no occasion for so many as that, two will be quite sufficient."

"They are quite at your disposal, Planchet."

"Very good; then I shall carry you off with me."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"Ah, you are asking me too much."

"You will admit, however, that it is important I should know where I am going."

"Do you like the country?"

"Only moderately, Planchet."

"In that case, you like town better?"

"That is as may be."

"Very well; I am going to take you to a place, half town and half country."

"Good."

"To a place where I am sure you will amuse yourself."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and more wonderful still, to a place from which you have just returned, for the purpose only, it would seem, of getting bored here."

"It is to Fontainebleau you are going, then?"

"Exactly; to Fontainebleau."

"And, in heaven's name, what are you going to do at Fontainebleau?"

Planchet answered D'Artagnan by a wink full of sly humor.

"You have some property there, you rascal."

"Oh, a very paltry affair; a little bit of a house—nothing more."

"I understand you."

"But it is tolerable enough, after all."

"I am going to Planchet's country-seat!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Whenever you like."

"Did we not fix to-morrow?"

"Let us say to-morrow, if you like; and then, besides, to-morrow is the 14th, that is to say, the day before the one when I am afraid of getting bored; so we will look upon it as an understood thing."

"Agreed, by all means."

"You will lend me one of your horses?"

"The best I have."

"No; I prefer the gentlest of all; I never was a very good rider, as you know, and in my grocery business I have got more awkward than ever; besides——"

"Besides what?"

"Why," added Planchet, "I do not wish to fatigue myself."

"Why so?" D'Artagnan ventured to ask.

"Because I should lose half the pleasure I expect to enjoy," replied Planchet. And thereupon he rose from his sack of Indian corn, stretching himself, and making all his bones crack, one after the other, with a sort of harmony.

"Planchet! Planchet!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "I do

declare that there is no sybarite upon the whole face of the globe who can for a moment be compared to you. Oh, Planchet, it is very clear that we have never yet eaten a ton of salt together."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because, even now I can scarcely say I know you," said D'Artagnan, "and because, in point of fact, I return to the opinion which, for a moment, I had formed of you that day at Boulogne, when you strangled, or did so as nearly as possible, M. de Wardes's valet, Lubin; in plain language, Planchet, that you are a man of great resources."

Planchet began to laugh with a laugh full of self-conceit; bade the musketeer good-night, and went down to his back shop, which he used as a bedroom. D'Artagnan resumed his original position upon his chair, and his brow, which had been unruffled for a moment, became more pensive than ever. He had already forgotten the whims and dreams of Planchet. "Yes," said he, taking up again the thread of his thoughts, which had been broken by the whimsical conversation in which we have just permitted our readers to participate. "Yes, yes, those three points include everything: First, to ascertain what Baisemeaux wanted with Aramis; secondly, to learn why Aramis does not let me hear from him; and thirdly, to ascertain where Porthos is. The whole mystery lies in these three points. Since, therefore," continued D'Artagnan, "our friends tell us nothing, we must have recourse to our own poor intelligence. I must do what I can, *mordieux*, or rather *Malaga*, as Planchet would say."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LETTER FROM M. BAISEMEAUX.

D'ARTAGNAN, faithful to his plan, went the very next morning to pay a visit to M. de Baisemeaux. It was cleaning up or tidying day at the Bastile; the cannons were furbished up, the staircases scraped and cleaned; and the jailers seemed to be carefully engaged in polishing the very keys. As for the soldiers belonging to the garrison, they were walking about in different courtyards, under the pretense that they were clean enough. The governor, Baisemeaux, received D'Artagnan with more than ordinary politeness, but he behaved towards him with so marked a reserve of manner, that all D'Artagnan's tact and cleverness could not get a syllable out of him. The more he kept himself within bounds, the more D'Artagnan's suspicion increased. The latter even fancied he remarked that the governor was acting under the influence of a recent recommendation. Baisemeaux had not been at the Palais-Royal with D'Artagnan the same cold and impenetrable man which the latter now found in the Baisemeaux of the Bastile. When D'Artagnan wished to make him talk about the urgent money matters which had brought Baisemeaux in search of D'Artagnan, and had rendered him expansive, notwithstanding what had passed on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some orders to give in the prison, and left D'Artagnan so long alone, waiting for him, that our musketeer, feeling sure that he should not get another syllable out of him, left the Bastile without waiting until Baisemeaux returned from his inspection. But D'Artagnan's suspicions were aroused, and when once that was

the case, D'Artagnan could not sleep or remain quiet for a moment. He was among men what the cat is among quadrupeds, the emblem of anxiety and impatience, at the same moment. A restless cat can no more remain in the same place than a silk thread wafted idly to and fro with every breath of air. A cat on the watch is as motionless as death stationed at its place of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can draw it from its meditations. D'Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, suddenly threw aside the feeling, like a cloak which he felt too heavy on his shoulders, and said to himself that that which they were concealing from him, was the very thing it was important he should know; and, consequently, he reasoned that Baisemeaux would not fail to put Aramis on his guard, if Aramis had given him any particular recommendation, and this was, in fact, the very thing that happened.

Baisemeaux had hardly had time to return from the donjon, than D'Artagnan placed himself in ambuscade close to the Rue du Petit-Muse, so as to see every one who might leave the gates of the Bastile. After he had spent an hour on the look-out from the "Golden Portcullis," under the pent-house of which he could keep himself a little in the shade, D'Artagnan observed a soldier leave the Bastile. This was, indeed, the surest indication he could possibly have wished for, as every jailer or warder has certain days, and even certain hours, for leaving the Bastile, since all are alike prohibited from having either wives or lodgings in the castle, and can accordingly leave without exciting any curiosity; but a soldier once in barracks is kept there for four-and-twenty hours when on duty,—and no one knew this better than D'Artagnan. The guardsman in question, therefore, was not likely to leave in his regimentals, except on an express and urgent order. The soldier, we were saying, left the

Bastile at a slow and lounging pace, like a happy mortal, in fact, who, instead of mounting sentry before a wearisome guard-house, or upon a bastion no less wearisome, has the good luck to get a little liberty, in addition to a walk,—both pleasures being luckily reckoned as part of his time on duty. He bent his steps towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, enjoying the fresh air and the warmth of the sun, and looking at all the pretty faces he passed. D'Artagnan followed him at a distance; he had not yet arranged his ideas as to what was to be done. "I must, first of all," he thought, "see the fellow's face. A man seen is a man judged." D'Artagnan increased his pace, and, which was not very difficult, by the by, soon got in advance of the soldier. Not only did he observe that his face showed a tolerable amount of intelligence and resolution, but he noticed also that his nose was a little red. "He has a weakness for brandy, I see," said D'Artagnan to himself. At the same moment that he remarked his red nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper in his belt.

"Good, he has a letter," added D'Artagnan. The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter. But a common soldier would, of course, be only too delighted at having been selected by M. de Baisemeaux as a special messenger, and would not be likely to sell his message. As D'Artagnan was biting his nails, the soldier continued to advance more and more into the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. "He is certainly going to Saint-Mandé," he said to himself, "and I shall not be able to learn what the letter contains." It was enough to drive him wild. "If I were in uniform," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would have this fellow seized, and his letter with him. I could easily get assistance at the very first guard-house; but the devil take me if I mention my name in an affair of this kind. If I were to treat him to something to drink, his suspicions

would be roused; and besides, he might drink me drunk. *Mordieux!* my wits seem to have left me," said D'Artagnan; "it is all over with me. Yet, supposing I were to attack this poor devil, make him draw his sword and kill him for the sake of his letter? No harm in that, if it were a question of a letter from a queen to a nobleman, or a letter from a cardinal to a queen; but what miserable intrigues are those of Messieurs Aramis and Fouquet with M. Colbert. A man's life for that? No, no, indeed; not even ten crowns." As he philosophized in this manner, biting, first his nails, and then his mustaches, he perceived a group of archers and a commissary of the police engaged in carrying away a man of very gentlemanly exterior, who was struggling with all his might against them. The archers had torn his clothes, and were dragging him roughly away. He begged they would lead him along more respectfully, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier. And observing our soldier walking in the street, he called out, "Help, comrade."

The soldier walked on with the same step towards the man who had called out to him, followed by the crowd. An idea suddenly occurred to D'Artagnan; it was his first one, and we shall find it was not a bad one either. During the time the gentleman was relating to the soldier that he had just been seized in a house as a thief, when the truth was he was only there as a lover; and while the soldier was pitying him, and offering him consolation and advice with that gravity which a French soldier has always ready whenever his vanity or his *esprit de corps* is concerned, D'Artagnan glided behind the soldier, who was closely hemmed in by the crowd, and with a rapid sweep, like a sabre slash, snatched the letter from his belt. As at this moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was pulling about the soldier, to show how the commissary of police had pulled him about, D'Artagnan effected his

pillage of the letter without the slightest interference. He stationed himself about ten paces distant, behind the pillar of an adjoining house, and read on the address, "To Monsieur du Vallon, at Monsieur Fouquet's Saint-Mandé."

"Good!" he said, and then he unsealed, without tearing the letter, drew out the paper, which was folded in four, from the inside; which contained only these words:—

"DEAR MONSIEUR DU VALLON—Will you be good enough to tell Monsieur d'Herblay that *he* has been to the Bastile, and has been making inquiries.

"Your devoted

"DE BAISEMEAUX."

"Very good! all right!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "it is clear enough now. Porthos is engaged in it." Being now satisfied of what he wished to know: "*Mordious!*" thought the musketeer, "what is to be done with that poor devil of a soldier? That hot-headed, cunning fellow, De Baisemeaux, will make him pay dearly for my trick,—if he returns without the letter, what will they do to him? Besides, I don't want the letter; when the egg has been sucked, what is the good of the shell?" D'Artagnan perceived that the commissary and the archers had succeeded in convincing the soldier, and went on their way with the prisoner, the latter being still surrounded by the crowd, and continuing his complaints. D'Artagnan advanced into the very middle of the crowd, let the letter fall, without any one having observed him, and then retreated rapidly. The soldier resumed his route towards Saint-Mandé, his mind occupied with the gentleman who had implored his protection. Suddenly he thought of his letter, and, looking at his belt, saw that it was no longer there. D'Artagnan derived no little satisfaction from his sudden terrified cry. The poor soldier

in the greatest anguish of mind looked round him on every side, and at last, about twenty paces behind him, he perceived the lucky envelope. He pounced on it like a falcon on its prey. The envelope was certainly a little dirty, and rather crumpled, but at all events the letter itself was found. D'Artagnan observed that the broken seal attracted the soldier's attention a good deal, but he finished apparently by consoling himself, and returned the letter to his belt. "Go on," said D'Artagnan, "I have plenty of time before me, so you may precede me. It appears that Aramis is not in Paris, since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. Dear Porthos, how delighted I shall be to see him again, and to have some conversation with him!" said the Gascon. And, regulating his pace according to that of the soldier, he promised himself to arrive a quarter of an hour after him at M. Fouquet's.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL BE DELIGHTED TO FIND THAT
PORTHOS HAS LOST NOTHING OF HIS MUSCULARITY.

D'ARTAGNAN had, according to his usual style, calculated that every hour is worth sixty minutes, and every minute worth sixty seconds. Thanks to this perfectly exact calculation of minutes and seconds, he reached the superintendent's door at the very moment the soldier was leaving it with his belt empty. D'Artagnan presented himself at the door, which a porter with a profusely embroidered livery held half opened for him. D'Artagnan would very much have liked to enter without giving his name, but this was impossible, and so he gave it. Notwithstanding this concession, which ought to have removed every difficulty in the way, at least D'Artagnan thought

so, the *concierge* hesitated ; however, at the second repetition of the title, captain of the king's guards, the *concierge*, without quite leaving the passage clear for him, ceased to bar it completely. D'Artagnan understood that orders of the most positive character had been given. He decided, therefore, to tell a falsehood,—a circumstance, moreover, which did not very seriously affect his peace of mind, when he saw that beyond the falsehood the safety of the state itself, or even purely and simply his own individual personal interest, might be at stake. He moreover added to the declarations he had already made, that the soldier sent to M. du Vallon was his own messenger, and that the only object that letter had in view was to announce his intended arrival. From that moment, no one opposed D'Artagnan's entrance any further, and he entered accordingly. A valet wished to accompany him, but he answered that it was useless to take that trouble on his account, inasmuch as he knew perfectly well where M. du Vallon was. There was nothing, of course, to say to a man so thoroughly and completely informed on all points, and D'Artagnan was permitted therefore to do as he liked. The terraces, the magnificent apartments, the gardens, were all reviewed and narrowly inspected by the musketeer. He walked for a quarter of an hour in this more than royal residence, which included as many wonders as articles of furniture, and as many servants as there were columns and doors. "Decidedly," he said to himself, "this mansion has no other limits than the pillars of the habitable world. Is it probable Porthos has taken it into his head to go back to Pierrefonds without even leaving M. Fouquet's house?" He finally reached a remote part of the château inclosed by a stone wall, which was covered with a profusion of thick plants, luxuriant in blossoms as large and solid as fruit. At equal distances on the top of this wall were placed vari-

ous statues in timid or mysterious attitudes. These were vestals hidden beneath the long Greek peplum, with its thick sinuous folds: agile nymphs, covered with their marble veils, and guarding the palace with their furtive glances. A statue of Hermes, with his finger on his lips; one of Iris, with extended wings; another of Night, sprinkled all over with poppies, dominated the gardens and outbuildings, which could be seen through the trees. All these statues threw in white relief their profiles upon the dark ground of the tall cypresses, which darted their somber summits towards the sky. Around these cypresses were entwined climbing roses, whose flowering rings were fastened to every fork of the branches, and spread over the lower boughs and the various statues showers of flowers of the rarest fragrance. These enchantments seemed to the musketeer the result of the greatest efforts of the human mind. He felt in a dreamy, almost poetical, frame of mind. The idea that Porthos was living in so perfect an Eden gave him a higher idea of Porthos, showing how tremendously true it is, that even the very highest orders of minds are not quite exempt from the influence of surroundings. D'Artagnan found the door, and on, or rather in the door a kind of spring which he detected; having touched it, the door flew open. D'Artagnan entered, closed the door behind him, and advanced into a pavilion built in a circular form, in which no other sound could be heard but cascades and the songs of birds. At the door of the pavilion he met a lackey.

"It is here, I believe," said D'Artagnan, without hesitation, "that M. le Baron du Vallon is staying?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered the lackey.

"Have the goodness to tell him that M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of the king's musketeers, is waiting to see him."

D'Artagnan was introduced into the *salon*, and had not long to remain in expectation: a well-remembered step shook the floor of the adjoining room, a door opened, or rather flew open, and Porthos appeared and threw himself into his friend's arms with a sort of embarrassment which did not ill become him. "You here?" he exclaimed.

"And you?" replied D'Artagnan. "Ah, you sly fellow!"

"Yes," said Porthos, with a somewhat embarrassed smile; "yes, you see I am staying in M. Fouquet's house, at which you are not a little surprised, I suppose?"

"Not at all; why should you not be one of M. Fouquet's friends? M. Fouquet has a very large number, particularly among clever men."

Porthos had the modesty not to take the compliment to himself. "Besides," he added, "you saw me at Belle-Isle."

"A greater reason for my believing you to be one of M. Fouquet's friends."

"The fact is, I am acquainted with him," said Porthos, with a certain embarrassment of manner.

"Ah, friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how treacherously you have behaved towards me."

"In what way?" exclaimed Porthos.

"What! you complete so admirable a work as the fortifications of Belle-Isle, and you did not tell me of it!" Porthos colored. "Nay, more than that," continued D'Artagnan, "you saw me out yonder, you know I am in the king's service, and yet you could not guess that the king, jealously desirous of learning the name of the man whose abilities had wrought a work of which he heard the most wonderful accounts,—you could not guess, I say, that the king sent me to learn who this man was?"

"What! the king sent you to learn——"

"Of course; but don't let us speak of that any more."

"Not speak of it!" said Porthos; "on the contrary, we will speak of it; and so the king knew that we were fortifying Belle-Isle?"

"Of course; does not the king know everything?"

"But he did not know who was fortifying it?"

"No, he only suspected from what he had been told of the nature of the works, that it was some celebrated soldier or another."

"The devil!" said Porthos, "if I had only known that!"

"You would not have run away from Vannes as you did perhaps?"

"No; what did you say when you couldn't find me?"

"My dear fellow, I reflected."

"Ah, indeed; you reflect, do you? Well, and what did that reflection lead to?"

"It led me to guess the whole truth."

"Come, then, tell me what did you guess after all?" said Porthos, settling himself into an arm-chair, and assuming the airs of a sphinx.

"I guessed, in the first place, that you were fortifying Belle-Isle."

"There was no great difficulty in that, for you saw me at work."

"Wait a minute, I also guessed something else,—that you were fortifying Belle-Isle by M. Fouquet's orders."

"That's true."

"But even that is not all. Whenever I feel myself in trim for guessing, I do not stop on my road; and so I guessed that M. Fouquet wished to preserve the most absolute secrecy respecting these fortifications."

"I believe that was his intention, in fact," said Porthos.

"Yes; but do you know why he wished to keep it secret?"

"In order it should not become known, perhaps," said Porthos.

"That was his principal reason. But his wish was subservient to a bit of generosity——"

"In fact," said Porthos, "I have heard it said that M. Fouquet was a very generous man."

"To a bit of generosity he wished to exhibit towards the king."

"Oh, oh!"

"You seem surprised at that?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't guess?"

"No."

"Well, I know it, then."

"You are a wizard."

"Not at all, I assure you!"

"How do you know it, then?"

"By a very simple means. I heard M. Fouquet himself say so to the king."

"Say what to the king?"

"That he fortified Belle-Isle on his majesty's account, and that he had made him a present of Belle-Isle."

"And you heard M. Fouquet say that to the king?"

"In those very words. He even added: 'Belle-Isle has been fortified by an engineer, one of my friends, a man of a great deal of merit, whom I shall ask your majesty's permission to present to you.'

"'What is his name?' said the king.

"'The Baron du Vallon,' M. Fouquet replied.

"'Very well,' returned his majesty, 'you will present him to me.'"

"The king said that?"

"Upon the word of a D'Artagnan!"

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos. "Why have I not been presented, then?"

"Have they not spoken to you about this presentation?"

"Yes, certainly; but I am always kept waiting for it."

"Be easy, it will be sure to come."

"Humph! humph!" grumbled Porthos, which D'Artagnan pretended not to hear; and, changing the conversation, he said, "You seem to be living in a very solitary place here, my dear fellow?"

"I always preferred retirement. I am of a melancholy disposition," replied Porthos, with a sigh.

"Really, that is odd," said D'Artagnan, "I never remarked that before."

"It is only since I have taken to reading," said Porthos, with a thoughtful air.

"But the labors of the mind have not affected the health of the body, I trust?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"Your strength is as great as ever?"

"Too great, my friend, too great."

"Ah! I had heard that, for a short time after your arrival——"

"That I could hardly move a limb, I suppose?"

"How was it?" said D'Artagnan, smiling, "and why was it you could not move?"

Porthos, perceiving that he had made a mistake, wished to correct it. "Yes, I came from Belle-Isle here upon very hard horses," he said, "and that fatigued me."

"I am no longer astonished, then, since I, who followed you, found seven or eight lying dead on the road."

"I am very heavy, you know," said Porthos.

"So that you were bruised all over."

"My marrow melted, and that made me very ill."

"Poor Porthos! But how did Aramis act towards you under those circumstances?"

"Very well, indeed. He had me attended to by M. Fouquet's own doctor. But just imagine, at the end of a week I could not breathe any longer."

"What do you mean?"

"The room was too small, I had absorbed every atom of air."

"Indeed?"

"I was told so, at least; and so I was removed into another apartment."

"Where you were able to breathe, I hope and trust?"

"Yes, more freely; but no exercise—nothing to do. The doctor pretended that I was not to stir; I, on the contrary, felt that I was stronger than ever; that was the cause of a very serious accident."

"What accident?"

"Fancy, my dear fellow, that I revolted against the directions of that ass of a doctor, and I resolved to go out, whether it suited him or not: and, consequently, I told the valet who waited on me to bring me my clothes."

"You were quite naked, then?"

"Oh, no! on the contrary, I had a magnificent dressing-gown to wear. The lackey obeyed; I dressed myself in my own clothes, which had become too large for me; but a strange circumstance had happened,—my feet had become too large."

"Yes, I quite understand."

"And my boots too small."

"You mean your feet were still swollen."

"Exactly; you have hit it."

"*Pardieu!* And is that the accident you were going to tell me about?"

"Oh, yes; I did not make the same reflection you have done. I said to myself: 'Since my feet have entered my boots ten times, there is no reason why they should not go in the eleventh.'"

"Allow me to tell you, my dear Porthos, that, on this occasion, you failed in your logic."

"In short, then, they placed me opposite to a part of the room which was partitioned; I tried to get my boot on; I pulled it with my hands, I pushed with all the strength of the muscles of my leg, making the most unheard-of efforts, when suddenly, the two tags of my boots remained in my hands, and my foot struck out like a ballista."

"How learned you are in fortification, dear Porthos."

"My foot darted out like a ballista, and came against the partition, which it broke in; I really thought that, like Samson, I had demolished the temple. And the number of pictures, the quantity of china, vases of flowers, carpets, and window-panes that fell down were really wonderful."

"Indeed!"

"Without reckoning that, on the other side of the partition was a small table laden with porcelain——"

"Which you knocked over?"

"Which I dashed to the other side of the room," said Porthos, laughing.

"Upon my word it is, as you say, astonishing," replied D'Artagnan, beginning to laugh also; whereupon Porthos laughed louder than ever.

"I broke," said Porthos, in a voice half-choked from his increasing mirth, "more than three thousand francs worth of china—ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan.

"I smashed more than four thousand francs worth of glass!—ho, ho, ho!"

"Excellent."

"Without counting a luster, which fell on my head and was broken into a thousand pieces—ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon your head?" said D'Artagnan, holding his sides.

"On top."

"But your head was broken, I suppose?"

"No, since I tell you, on the contrary, my dear fellow, that it was the luster which was broken, like glass, which, in point of fact, it was."

"Ah! the luster was glass, you say."

"Venetian glass! a perfect curiosity, quite matchless, indeed, and weighed two hundred pounds."

"And it fell upon your head!"

"Upon my head. Just imagine, a globe of crystal, gilded all over, the lower part beautifully encrusted, perfumes burning at the top, with jets from which flame issued when they were lighted."

"I quite understand, but they were not lighted at the time, I suppose?"

"Happily not, or I should have been grilled prematurely."

"And you were only knocked down flat, instead?"

"Not at all."

"How, 'not at all'?"

"Why the luster fell on my skull. It appears that we have upon the top of our heads an exceedingly thick crust."

"Who told you that, Porthos?"

"The doctor. A sort of dome which would bear Nôtre-Dame."

"Bah!"

"Yes, it seems that our skulls are made in that manner."

"Speak for yourself, my dear fellow, it is your own skull that is made in that manner, and not the skulls of other people."

"Well, that may be so," said Porthos, conceitedly, "so much, however, was that the case, in my instance, that no sooner did the luster fall upon the dome which we have at the top of our head, than there was a report like

a cannon, the crystal was broken to pieces, and I fell, covered from head to foot."

"With blood, poor Porthos!"

"Not at all; with perfumes, which smelt like rich creams; it was delicious, but the odor was too strong, and I felt quite giddy from it; perhaps you have experienced it sometimes yourself, D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, in inhaling the scent of the lily of the valley; so that, my poor friend, you were knocked over by the shock and overpowered by the perfumes?"

"Yes; but what is very remarkable, for the doctor told me he had never seen anything like it——"

"You had a bump on your head I suppose?" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"I had five."

"Why five?"

"I will tell you; the luster had, at its lower extremity five gilt ornaments, excessively sharp."

"Oh!"

"Well, these five ornaments penetrated my hair, which, as you see, I wear very thick."

"Fortunately so."

"And they made a mark on my skin. But just notice the singularity of it, these things seem really only to happen to me! Instead of making indentations, they made bumps. The doctor could never succeed in explaining that to me satisfactorily."

"Well, then, I will explain it to you."

"You will do me a great service if you will," said Porthos, winking his eyes which, with him, was a sign of the profoundest attention.

"Since you have been employing your brain in studies of an exalted character, in important calculations, and so on, the head has gained a certain advantage, so that your head is now too full of science."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. The result is, that, instead of allowing any foreign matter to penetrate the interior of the head, your bony box or skull, which is already too full, avails itself of the openings which are made in it allowing this excess to escape."

"Ah!" said Porthos, to whom this explanation appeared clearer than that of the doctor.

"The five protuberances, caused by the five ornaments of the luster, must certainly have been scientific globules, brought to the surface by the force of circumstances."

"In fact," said Porthos, "the real truth is, that I felt far worse outside my head than inside. I will even confess, that when I put my hat upon my head, clapping it on my head with that graceful energy which we gentlemen of the sword possess, if my fist was not very gently applied, I experienced the most painful sensations."

"I quite believe you, Porthos."

"Therefore, my friend," said the giant, "M. Fouquet decided, seeing how slightly-built the house was, to give me another lodging, and so they brought me here."

"It is the private park, I think, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Where the rendezvous are made; that park, indeed, which is so celebrated in some of those mysterious stories about the superintendent?"

"I don't know; I have had no rendezvous or heard mysterious stories myself, but they have authorized me to exercise my muscles, and I take advantage of the permission by rooting up some of the trees."

"What for?"

"To keep my hand in, and also to take some birds' nests; I find it more convenient than climbing."

"You are as pastoral as Tyrcis, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, I like the small eggs; I like them very much

better than larger ones. You have no idea how delicate an *omelette* is, if made of four or five hundred eggs of linnets, chaffinches, starlings, blackbirds and thrushes."

"But five hundred eggs is perfectly monstrous!"

"A salad-bowl will hold them easily enough," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos admiringly for full five minutes, as if he had seen him for the first time, while Porthos spread his chest out joyously and proudly. They remained in this state several minutes, Porthos smiling, and D'Artagnan looking at him. D'Artagnan was evidently trying to give the conversation a new turn. "Do you amuse yourself much here, Porthos?" he asked at last, very likely after he had found out what he was searching for.

"Not always."

"I can imagine that; but when you get thoroughly bored, by and by, what do you intend to do?"

"Oh! I shall not be here for any length of time. Aramis is waiting until the last bump on my head disappears, in order, to present me to the king, who I am told cannot endure the sight of a bump."

"Aramis is still in Paris, then?"

"No."

"Whereabouts is he, then?"

"At Fontainebleau."

"Alone?"

"With M. Fouquet."

"Very good. But do you happen to know one thing?"

"No, tell it me, and then I shall know."

"Well, then, I think that Aramis is forgetting you."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes; for at Fontainebleau yonder, you must know, they are laughing, dancing, banqueting, and drawing the corks of M. de Mazarin's wine in fine style. Are you

aware that they have a ballet every evening there?"

"The deuce they have!"

"I assure you that your dear Aramis is forgetting you."

"Well, that is not at all unlikely, and I have myself thought so sometimes."

"Unless he is playing you a trick, the sly fellow!"

"Oh!"

"You know that Aramis is as sly as a fox."

"Yes, but to play *me* a trick——"

"Listen: in the first place, he puts you under a sort of sequestration."

"He sequesters me! Do you mean to say I am sequestered?"

"I think so."

"I wish you would have the goodness to prove that to me."

"Nothing easier. Do you ever go out?"

"Never."

"Do you ever ride on horseback?"

"Never."

"Are your friends allowed to come and see you?"

"Never."

"Very well, then; never to go out, never to ride on horseback, never to be allowed to see your friends, that is called being sequestered."

"But why should Aramis sequester me?" inquired Porthos.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "be frank, Porthos."

"As gold."

"It was Aramis who drew the plan of the fortifications at Belle-Isle, was it not?"

Porthos colored as he said, "Yes; but that was all he did."

"Exactly, and my own opinion is that it was no very great affair after all."

"That is mine, too."

"Very good ; I am delighted we are of the same opinion."

"He never even came to Belle-Isle," said Porthos.

"There now, you see."

"It was I who went to Vannes, as you may have seen."

"Say, rather, as I did see. Well, that is precisely the state of the case, my dear Porthos. Aramis, who only drew the plans, wishes to pass himself off as the engineer, whilst you, who, stone by stone, built the wall, the citadel, and the bastions, he wishes to reduce to the rank of a mere builder."

"By builders, you mean mason, perhaps?"

"Mason ; the very word."

"Plasterer, in fact?"

"Precisely."

"Hodman?"

"Exactly."

"Oh ! oh ! my dear Aramis, you seem to think you are only five-and-twenty years of age still."

"Yes, and that is not all, for he believes you are fifty."

"I should have amazingly liked to have seen him at work."

"Yes, indeed."

"A fellow who has got the gout?"

"Yes."

"Who has lost three of his teeth?"

"Four."

"While I, look at mine." And Porthos, opening his large mouth very wide, displayed two rows of teeth not quite as white as snow, but even, hard, and sound as ivory.

"You can hardly believe, Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "what a fancy the king has for good teeth. Yours decide me ; I will present you to the king myself."

"You?"

"Why not? Do you think I have less credit at court than Aramis?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you think that I have the slightest pretensions upon the fortifications at Belle-Isle?"

"Certainly not."

"It is your own interest alone which would induce me to do it."

"I don't doubt it in the least."

"Well, I am the intimate friend of the king; and a proof of that is, that whenever there is anything disagreeable to tell him, it is I who have to do it."

"But, dear D'Artagnan, "if you present me——"

"Well!"

"Aramis will be angry."

"With me?"

"No, with *me*."

"Bah! whether he or I present you, since you are to be presented, what does it matter?"

"They were going to get me some clothes made."

"Your own are splendid."

"Oh! those I had ordered were far more beautiful."

"Take care: the king likes simplicity."

"In that case, I will be simple. But what will M. Fouquet say, when he learns that I have left?"

"Are you a prisoner, then, on parole?"

"No, not quite that. But I promised him I would not leave without letting him know."

"Wait a minute, we shall return to that presently. Have you anything to do here?"

"I, nothing: nothing of any importance, at least."

"Unless, indeed, you are Aramis's representative for something of importance."

"By no means."

"What I tell you—pray understand that—is out of interest for you. I suppose, for instance, that you are commissioned to send messages and letters to him?"

"Ah! letters—yes. I send certain letters to him."

"Where?"

"To Fontainebleau."

"Have you any letters, then?"

"But——"

"Nay, let me speak. Have you any letters, I say?"

"I have just received one for him."

"Interesting?"

"I suppose so."

"You do not read them, then?"

"I am not at all curious," said Porthos, as he drew out of his pocket the soldier's letter which Porthos had not read, but D'Artagnan had.

"Do you know what to do with it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; do as I always do, send it to him."

"Not so."

"Why not? Keep it, then?"

"Did they not tell you that this letter was important?"

"Very important."

"Well you must take it yourself to Fontainebleau."

"To Aramis?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

"And since the king is there——"

"You will profit by that."

"I shall profit by the opportunity to present you to the king."

"Ah! D'Artagnan, there is no one like you for expedients."

"Therefore, instead of forwarding to our friend any

messages, which may or may not be faithfully delivered, we will ourselves be the bearers of the letter."

"I had never even thought of that, and yet it is simple enough."

"And therefore, because it is urgent, Porthos, we ought to set off at once."

"In fact," said Porthos, "the sooner we set off the less chance there is of Aramis's letter being delayed."

"Porthos, your reasoning is always accurate, and, in your case, logic seems to serve as an auxiliary to the imagination."

"Do you think so?" said Porthos.

"It is the result of your hard reading," replied D'Artagnan. "So come along, let us be off."

"But," said Porthos, "my promise to M. Fouquet?"

"Which?"

"Not to leave St. Mandé without telling him of it."

"Ah! Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how very young you still are."

"In what way?"

"You are going to Fontainebleau, are you not, where you will find M. Fouquet?"

"Yes."

"Probably in the king's palace?"

"Yes," repeated Porthos, with an air full of majesty.

"Well, you will accost him with these words: 'M. Fouquet, I have the honor to inform you that I have just left St. Mandé.'"

"And," said Porthos, with the same majestic mien, "seeing me at Fontainebleau at the king's, M. Fouquet will not be able to tell me I am not speaking the truth."

"My dear Porthos, I was just on the point of opening my lips to make the same remark, but you anticipate me in everything. Oh! Porthos, how fortunately you are

gifted! Years have made not the slightest impression on you."

"Not over-much, certainly."

"Then there is nothing more to say?"

"I think not."

"All your scruples are removed?"

"Quite so."

"In that case I shall carry you off with me."

"Exactly; and I will go and get my horse saddled."

"You have horses here, then?"

"I have five."

"You had them sent from Pierrefonds, I suppose?"

"No, M. Fouquet gave them to me."

"My dear Porthos, we shall not want five horses for two persons; besides, I have already three in Paris, which would make eight, and that will be too many."

"It would not be too many if I had some of my servants here; but, alas! I have not got them."

"Do you regret them, then?"

"I regret Mousqueton; I miss Mousqueton."

"What a good-hearted fellow you are, Porthos," said D'Artagnan; "but the best thing you can do is to leave your horses here, as you have left Mousqueton out yonder."

"Why so?"

"Because, by and by, it might turn out a very good thing if M. Fouquet had never given you anything at all."

"I don't understand you," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary you should understand."

"But yet——"

"I will explain to you later, Porthos."

"I'll wager it is some piece of policy or other."

"And of the most subtle character," returned D'Artagnan.

Porthos nodded his head at this word policy; then,

after a moment's reflection, he added, "I confess, D'Artagnan, that I am no politician."

"I know that well."

"Oh! no one knows what you told me yourself, you, the bravest of the brave."

"What did I tell you, Porthos?"

"That every man has his day. You told me so, and I have experienced it myself. There are certain days when one feels less pleasure than others in exposing one's self to a bullet or a sword-thrust."

"Exactly my own idea."

"And mine, too, although I can hardly believe in blows or thrusts that kill outright."

"The deuce! and yet you have killed a few in your time."

"Yes; but I have never been killed."

"Your reason is a very good one."

"Therefore, I do not believe I shall ever die from a thrust of a sword or a gun-shot."

"In that case, then, you are afraid of nothing. Ah! water perhaps?"

"Oh! I swim like an otter."

"Of a quartan fever, then?"

"I never had one yet, and I don't believe I ever shall; but there is one thing I will admit," and Porthos dropped his voice.

"What is that?" asked D'Artagnan, adopting the same tone of voice as Porthos.

"I must confess," repeated Porthos, "that I am horribly afraid of politics."

"Ah! bah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Upon my word, it's true," said Porthos, in a stentorian voice. "I have seen his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Richelieu, and his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Mazarin; the one was a red politician, the other a black politician; I never felt very much more satisfied with the

one than with the other; the first struck off the heads of M. de Marillac, M. de Thou, M. de Cinq-Mars, M. Chalais, M. de Boutteville, and M. de Montmorency; the second got a whole crowd of Frondeurs cut in pieces, and we belonged to them."

"On the contrary, we did not belong to them," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! indeed, yes; for, if I unsheathed my sword for the cardinal, I struck for the king."

"My good Porthos!"

"Well, I have done. My dread of politics is such, that if there is any question of politics in the matter, I should greatly prefer to return to Pierrefonds."

"You would be quite right, if that were the case. But with me, dear Porthos, no politics at all, that is quite clear. You have labored hard in fortifying Belle-Isle; the king wished to know the name of the clever engineer under whose directions the works were carried out; you are modest, as all men of true genius are; perhaps Aramis wishes to put you under a bushel. But I happen to seize hold of you; I make it known who you are; I produce you; the king rewards you; and that is the only policy I have to do with."

"And the only one I will have to do with either," said Porthos, holding out his hand to D'Artagnan.

But D'Artagnan knew Porthos's grasp; he knew that once imprisoned within the baron's five fingers, no hand ever left it without being half-crushed. He therefore held out, not his hand, but his fist, and Porthos did not even perceive the difference. The servants talked a little with each other in an undertone, and whispered a few words, which D'Artagnan understood, but which he took very good care not to let Porthos understand. "Our friend," he said to himself, "was really and truly Aramis's prisoner. Let us now see what the result will be of the liberation of the captive."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RAT AND THE CHEESE.

D'ARTAGNAN and Porthos returned on foot, as D'Artagnan set out. When D'Artagnan, as he entered the shop of the Pilon d'Or, announced to Planchet that M. de Vallon would be one of the privileged travelers, and as the plume in Porthos's hat made the wooden candles suspended over the front jingle together, a melancholy presentiment seemed to eclipse the delight Planchet had promised himself for the morrow. But the grocer had a heart of gold, ever mindful of the good old times—a trait that carries youth into old age. So Planchet, notwithstanding a sort of internal shiver, checked as soon as experienced, received Porthos with respect, mingled with the tenderest cordiality. Porthos, who was a little cold and stiff in his manners at first, on account of the social difference existing at that period between a baron and a grocer, soon began to soften when he perceived so much good-feeling and so many kind attentions in Planchet. He was particularly touched by the liberty which was permitted him to plunge his great palms into the boxes of dried fruits and preserves, into the sacks of nuts and almonds, and into the drawers full of sweetmeats. So that, notwithstanding Planchet's pressing invitations to go upstairs to the *entresol*, he chose as his favorite seat, during the evening which he had to spend at Planchet's house, the shop itself, where his fingers could always fish up whatever his nose detected. The delicious figs from Provence, filberts from the forest, Tours plums, were subjects of his uninterrupted attention for five consecutive hours. His teeth, like millstones, cracked heaps of nuts, the shells of which were scattered all over

the floor, where they were trampled by every one who went in and out of the shop; Porthos pulled from the stalk with his lips, at one mouthful, bunches of the rich Muscatel raisins with their beautiful bloom, half a pound of which passed at one gulp from his mouth to his stomach. In one of the corners of the shop, Planchet's assistants, huddled together, looked at each other without venturing to open their lips. They did not know who Porthos was, for they had never seen him before. The race of those Titans who had worn the cuirasses of Hugh Capet, Philip Augustus, and Francis the First, had already begun to disappear. They could hardly help thinking he might be the ogre of the fairy tale, who was going to turn the whole contents of Planchet's shop into his insatiable stomach, and that, too, without in the slightest degree displacing the barrels and chests that were in it. Cracking, munching, chewing, nibbling, sucking, and swallowing, Porthos occasionally said to the grocer:—

"You do a very good business here, friend Planchet."

"He will very soon have none at all to do, if this sort of thing continues," grumbled the foreman, who had Planchet's word that he should be his successor. In the midst of his despair, he approached Porthos, who blocked up the whole of the passage leading from the back shop to the shop itself. He hoped that Porthos would rise and that this movement would distract his devouring ideas.

"What do you want, my man?" asked Porthos affably.

"I should like to pass you, monsieur, if it is not troubling you too much."

"Very well," said Porthos, "it does not trouble me in the least."

At the same moment he took hold of the young fellow by the waistband, lifted him off the ground, and placed him very gently on the other side, smiling all the while with the same affable expression. As soon as Porthos

had placed him on the ground, the lad's legs so shook under him that he fell back upon some sacks of corks. But noticing the giant's gentleness of manner, he ventured again, and said :

"Ah, monsieur! pray be careful."

"What about?" inquired Porthos.

"You are positively putting a fiery furnace into your body."

"How is that, my good fellow?" said Porthos.

"All those things are very heating to the system."

"Which?"

"Raisins, nuts, and almonds."

"Yes; but if raisins, nuts, and almonds are heating——"

"There is no doubt at all of it, monsieur."

"Honey is very cooling," said Porthos, stretching out his hand towards a small barrel of honey which was open, and he plunged the scoop with which the wants of the customers were supplied into it, and swallowed a good half-pound at one gulp.

"I must trouble you for some water now, my man," said Porthos.

"In a pail, monsieur?" asked the lad, simply.

"No, in a water-bottle; that will be quite enough;" and raising the bottle to his mouth, as a trumpeter does his trumpet, he emptied the bottle at a single draught.

Planchet was agitated in every fiber of propriety and self-esteem. However, a worthy representative of the hospitality which prevailed in early days, he reigned to be talking very earnestly with D'Artagnan, and incessantly repeated:—"Ah! monsieur, what a happiness! what an honor!"

"What time shall we have supper, Planchet?" inquired Porthos, "I feel hungry."

The foreman clasped his hands together. The two

others got under the counters, fearing Porthos might have a taste for human flesh.

"We shall only take a sort of snack here," said D'Artagnan; "and when we get to Planchet's country-seat, we will have supper."

"Ah! ah! so we are going to your country-house, Planchet," said Porthos; "so much the better."

"You overwhelm me, Monsieur le Baron."

The "Monsieur le Baron," had a great effect upon the men, who detected a personage of the highest quality in an appetite of that kind. This title, too, reassured them. They had never heard that an ogre was ever called "Monsieur le Baron."

"I will take a few biscuits to eat on the road," said Porthos, carelessly; and he emptied a whole jar of aniseed biscuits into the huge pocket of his doublet.

"My shop is saved!" exclaimed Planchet.

"Yes, as the cheese was," whispered the foreman.

"What cheese?"

"That Dutch cheese, inside which a rat had made his way, and we only found the rind left."

Planchet looked all round his shop, and observing the different articles which had escaped Porthos's teeth, he found the comparison somewhat exaggerated. The foreman, who remarked what was passing in his master's mind, said, "Take care; he is not gone yet."

"Have you any fruit here?" said Porthos, as he went upstairs to the *entresol*, where it had just been announced that some refreshment was prepared.

"Alas!" thought the grocer, addressing a look at D'Artagnan full of entreaty, which the latter half understood.

As soon as they had finished eating they set off. It was late when the three riders, who had left Paris about six in the evening, arrived at Fontainebleau. The

journey passed very agreeably. Porthos took a fancy to Planchet's society, because the latter was very respectful in his manners, and seemed delighted to talk to him about his meadows, his woods, and his rabbit-warrens. Porthos had all the taste and pride of a landed proprietor. When D'Artagnan saw his two companions in earnest conversation, he took the opposite side of the road, and letting his bridle drop upon his horse's neck, separated himself from the whole world, as he had done from Porthos and from Planchet. The moon shone softly through the foliage of the forest. The breezes of the open country rose deliciously perfumed to the horses' nostrils, and they snorted and pranced along delightedly. Porthos and Planchet began to talk about hay-crops. Planchet admitted to Porthos that in the advanced years of his life, he had certainly neglected agricultural pursuits for commerce, but that his childhood had been passed in Picardy in the beautiful meadows where the grass grew as high as the knees, and where he had played under the green apple-trees covered with red-cheeked fruit; he went on to say, that he had solemnly promised himself that as soon as he should have made his fortune, he would return to nature, and end his days, as he had begun them, as near as he possibly could to the earth itself, where all men must sleep at last.

"Eh, eh!" said Porthos; "in that case, my dear Monsieur Planchet, your retirement is not far distant."

"How so?"

"Why, you seem to be in the way of making your fortune very soon."

"Well, we are getting on pretty well, I must admit," replied Planchet.

"Come, tell me what is the extent of your ambition, and what is the amount you intend to retire upon?"

"There is one circumstance, monsieur," said Planchet,

without answering the question, "which occasions me a good deal of anxiety."

"What is it?" inquired Porthos, looking all round him as if in search of the circumstance that annoyed Planchet, and desirous of freeing him from it.

"Why, formerly," said the grocer, "you used to call me Planchet quite short, and you would have spoken to me then in a much more familiar manner than you do now."

"Certainly, certainly, I should have said so formerly," replied the good-natured Porthos, with an embarrassment full of delicacy; "but formerly——"

"Formerly I was M. d'Artagnan's lackey; is not that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well if I am not quite his lackey, I am as much as ever I was his devoted servant; and more than that, since that time——"

"Well, Planchet?"

"Since that time, I have had the honor of being in partnership with him."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos. "What, has D'Artagnan gone into the grocery business?"

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, whom these words had drawn out of his reverie, and who entered into the conversation with that readiness and rapidity which distinguished every operation of his mind and body. "It was not D'Artagnan who entered into the grocery business, but Planchet, who entered into a political affair with me."

"Yes," said Planchet, with mingled pride and satisfaction, "we transacted a little business which brought me in a hundred thousand francs and M. d'Artagnan two hundred thousand."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos, with admiration.

"So that, monsieur le baron," continued the grocer, "I again beg you to be kind enough to call me Planchet, as you used to do; and to speak to me as familiarly as in old times. You cannot possibly imagine the pleasure it would give me."

"If that be the case, my dear Planchet, I will do so, certainly," replied Porthos. And as he was quite close to Planchet, he raised his hand, as if to strike him on the shoulder, in token of friendly cordiality; but a fortunate movement of the horse made him miss his aim, so that his hand fell on the crupper of Planchet's horse, instead; which made the animal's legs almost give way.

D'Artagnan burst out laughing, as he said, "Take care, Planchet; for if Porthos begins to like you so much, he will caress you, and if he caresses you, he will knock you as flat as a pancake. Porthos is still as strong as ever, you know."

"Oh," said Planchet, "Mousqueton is not dead, and yet monsieur le baron is very fond of him."

"Certainly," said Porthos, with a sigh which made all the three horses rear; "and I was only saying, this very morning, to D'Artagnan, how much I regretted him. But tell me, Planchet?"

"Thank you, monsieur le baron, thank you."

"Good lad, good lad! How many acres of park have you got?"

"Of park?"

"Yes; we will reckon up the meadows presently, and the woods afterwards."

"Whereabouts, monsieur?"

"At your château."

"Oh, monsieur le baron; I have neither château, nor park, nor meadows, nor woods."

"What have you got, then?" inquired Porthos, "and why do you call it a country-seat?"

"I did not call it a country-seat, monsieur le baron," replied Planchet, somewhat humiliated, "but a country-box."

"Ah, ah! I understand. You are modest."

"No, monsieur le baron; I speak the plain truth. I have rooms for a couple of friends, that's all."

"But in that case, whereabouts do your friends walk?"

"In the first place, they can walk about the king's forest, which is very beautiful."

"Yes, I know the forest is very fine," said Porthos; "nearly as beautiful as my forest at Berry."

Planchet opened his eyes very wide. "Have you a forest of the same kind as the forest at Fontainebleau, monsieur le baron?" he stammered out.

"Yes; I have two, indeed, but the one at Berry is my favorite."

"Why so?" asked Planchet.

"Because I don't know where it ends; and, also because it is full of poachers."

"How can the poachers make the forest so agreeable to you?"

"Because they hunt my game, and I hunt them—which, in these peaceful times, is for me a sufficiently pleasing picture of war on a small scale."

They had reached this turn of the conversation, when Planchet, looking up, perceived the houses at the commencement of Fontainebleau, the lofty outlines of which stood out strongly against the misty visage of the heavens; whilst, rising above the compact and irregularly-formed mass of buildings, the pointed roofs of the château were clearly visible, the slates of which glistened beneath the light of the moon, like the scales of an immense fish. "Gentlemen," said Planchet, "I have the honor to inform you that we have arrived at Fontainebleau."

CHAPTER XXXV.

PLANCHET'S COUNTRY-HOUSE.

THE cavaliers looked up, and saw that what Planchet had announced to them was true. Ten minutes afterwards they were in the street called the Rue de Lyon, on the opposite side of the hostelry of the Beau Paon. A high hedge of bushy elders, hawthorn, and wild hops, formed an impenetrable fence, behind which rose a white house, with a high tiled roof. Two of the windows, which were quite dark, looked upon the street. Between the two, a small door, with a porch supported by a couple of pillars, formed the entrance to the house. The door was gained by a step raised a little from the ground. Planchet got off his horse, as if he intended to knock at the door; but, on second thoughts, he took hold of his horse by the bridle, and led it about thirty paces further on, his two companions following him. He then advanced about another thirty paces, until he arrived at the door of a cart-house, lighted by an iron grating; and, lifting up a wooden latch, pushed open one of the folding-doors. He entered first, leading his horse after him by the bridle, into a small courtyard, where an odor met them which revealed their close vicinity to a stable. "That smells all right," said Porthos, loudly, getting off his horse, "and I almost begin to think I am near my own cows at Pierrefonds."

"I have only one cow," Planchet hastened to say modestly.

"And I have thirty," said Porthos; "or, rather, I don't exactly know how many I have."

When the two cavaliers had entered, Planchet fastened

the door behind them. In the meantime, D'Artagnan, who had dismounted with his usual agility, inhaled the fresh perfumed air with the delight a Parisian feels at the sight of green fields and fresh foliage, plucked a piece of honeysuckle with one hand, and of sweet-briar with the other. Porthos clawed hold of some peas which were twined round poles stuck into the ground, and ate, or rather browsed upon them, shells and all: and Planchet was busily engaged trying to wake up an old and infirm peasant, who was fast asleep in a shed, lying on a bed of moss, and dressed in an old stable suit of clothes. The peasant, recognizing Planchet, called him "the master," to the grocer's great satisfaction. "Stable the horses well, old fellow, and you shall have something good for yourself," said Planchet.

"Yes, yes; fine animals they are, too," said the peasant. "Oh! they shall have as much as they like."

"Gently, gently, my man," said D'Artagnan, "we are getting on a little too fast. A few oats, and a good bed—nothing more."

"Some bran and water for my horse," said Porthos, "for it is very warm, I think."

"Don't be afraid, gentlemen," replied Planchet; "Daddy Celestin is an old gendarme, who fought at Ivry. He knows all about horses; so come into the house." And he led the way along a well-sheltered walk, which crossed a kitchen-garden, then a small paddock, and came out into a little garden behind the house, the principal front of which, as we have already noticed, faced the street. As they approached, they could see, through two open windows on the ground floor, which led into a sitting-room, the interior of Planchet's residence. This room, softly lighted by a lamp placed on the table, seemed, from the end of the garden, like a smiling image of repose, comfort, and happiness. In every direction where the rays of light

fell, whether upon a piece of old china, or upon an article of furniture shining from excessive neatness, or upon the weapons hanging against the wall, the soft light was as softly reflected; and its rays seemed to linger everywhere, upon something or another agreeable to the eye. The lamp which lighted the room, whilst the foliage of jasmine and climbing roses hung in masses from the window-frames, splendidly illuminated a damask tablecloth as white as snow. The table was laid for two persons. Amber-colored wine sparkled in a long cut-glass bottle; and a large jug of blue china, with a silver lid, was filled with foaming cider. Near the table, in a high backed arm-chair, reclined, fast asleep, a woman of about thirty years of age, her face the very picture of health and freshness. Upon her knees lay a large cat, with her paws folded under her, and her eyes half-closed, purring in that significant manner which, according to feline habits, indicates perfect contentment. The two friends paused before the window in complete amazement, while Planchet, perceiving their astonishment, was in no little degree, secretly delighted at it.

"Ah! Planchet, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, "I now understand your absences."

"Oh, oh! there is some white linen!" said Porthos, in his turn, in a voice of thunder. At the sound of this gigantic voice, the cat took flight, the housekeeper woke up with a start, and Planchet, assuming a gracious air, introduced his two companions into the room, where the table was already laid.

"Permit me, my dear," he said, "to present to you Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan, my patron." D'Artagnan took the lady's hand in his in the most courteous manner, and with precisely the same chivalrous air as he would have taken Madame's.

"Monsieur la Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierre-

fonds," added Planchet. Porthos bowed with a reverence which Anne of Austria would have approved of.

It was then Planchet's turn, and he, unhesitatingly, embraced the lady in question, not, however, until he had made a sign as if requesting D'Artagnan's and Porthos's permission, a permission as a matter of course frankly conceded. D'Artagnan complimented Planchet, and said, "You are indeed a man who knows how to make life agreeable."

"Life, monsieur," said Planchet, laughing, "is capital which a man ought to invest as sensibly as he possibly can."

"And you get very good interest for yours," said Porthos, with a burst of laughter like a peal of thunder.

Planchet turned to his housekeeper. "You have before you," he said to her, "the two gentlemen who influenced the greatest, gayest, grandest portion of my life. I have spoken to you about them both very frequently."

"And about two others as well," said the lady, with a very decided Flemish accent.

"Madame is Dutch?" inquired D'Artagnan. Porthos curled his mustache, a circumstance which was not lost upon D'Artagnan, who remarked everything.

"I am from Antwerp," said the lady.

"And her name is Madame Gechter," said Planchet.

"You should not call her madame," said D'Artagnan.

"Why not?" asked Planchet.

"Because it would make her seem older every time you call her so."

"Well, I call her Trüchen."

"And a very pretty name too," said Porthos.

"Trüchen," said Planchet, "came to me from Flanders with her virtue and two thousand florins. She ran away from a brute of a husband who was in the habit of beating her. Being myself a Picard born, I was always very

fond of the Artesian women, and it is only a step from Artois to Flanders; she came crying bitterly to her god-father, my predecessor in the Rue des Lombards; she placed her two thousand florins in my establishment, which I have turned to very good account, and which have brought her in ten thousand."

"Bravo, Planchet."

"She is free and well off; she has a cow, a maid servant, and old Celestin at her orders; she mends my linen, knits my winter stockings; she only sees me every fortnight, and seems to make herself in all things tolerably happy."

"And indeed, gentlemen, I *am* very happy and comfortable," said Trüchen, with perfect ingenuousness.

Porthos began to curl the other side of his mustache. "The deuce," thought D'Artagnan, "can Porthos have any intentions in that quarter?"

In the meantime Trüchen had set her cook to work, had laid the table for two more, and covered it with every possible delicacy that could convert a light supper into a substantial meal, a meal into a regular feast. Fresh butter, salt beef, anchovies, tunny, a shopful of Planchet's commodities, fowls, vegetables, salad, fish from the pond and the river, game from the forest—all the produce in fact of the province. Moreover, Planchet returned from the cellar, laden with ten bottles of wine, the glass of which could hardly be seen for the thick coating of dust which covered them. Porthos's heart seemed to expand as he said, "I am hungry," and he sat himself beside Madame Trüchen, whom he looked at in the most killing manner. D'Artagnan seated himself on the other side of her, while Planchet, discreetly and full of delight, took his seat opposite.

"Do not trouble yourselves," he said, "if Trüchen

should leave the table now and then during supper; for she will have to look after your bedrooms."

In fact the housekeeper made her escape quite frequently, and they could hear, on the first floor above them, the creaking of the wooden bedsteads and the rolling of the castors on the floor. While this was going on, the three men, Porthos especially, ate and drank gloriously,—it was wonderful to see them. The ten full bottles were ten empty ones by the time Trüchen returned with the cheese. D'Artagnan still preserved his dignity and self-possession, but Porthos had lost a portion of his; and the mirth soon began to grow somewhat uproarious. D'Artagnan recommended a new descent into the cellar, and, as Planchet no longer walked with the steadiness of a well-trained foot-soldier, the captain of the musketeers proposed to accompany him. They set off, humming songs wild enough to frighten anybody who might be listening. Trüchen remained behind at table with Porthos. While the two wine-bibbers were looking behind the firewood for what they wanted, a sharp report was heard like the impact of a pair of lips on a lady's cheek.

"Porthos fancies himself at La Rochelle," thought D'Artagnan, as they returned freighted with bottles. Planchet was singing so loudly that he was incapable of noticing anything. D'Artagnan, whom nothing ever escaped remarked how much redder Trüchen's left cheek was than her right. Porthos was sitting on Trüchen's left, and was curling with both his hands both sides of his mustache at once, and Trüchen was looking at him with a most bewitching smile. The sparkling wine of Anjou very soon produced a remarkable effect upon the three companions. D'Artagnan had hardly strength enough left to take a candlestick to light Planchet up his own staircase. Planchet was pulling Porthos along, who was following Trüchen, who was herself jovial enough. It was D'Arta-

gnan who found out the rooms and the beds. Porthos threw himself into the one destined for him, after his friend had undressed him. D'Artagnan got into his own bed, saying to himself, "*Mordieux!* I had made up my mind never to touch that light-colored wine, which brings my early camp days back again. Fie! fie! if my musketeers were only to see their captain in such a state." And drawing the curtains of his bed, he added, "Fortunately enough, though, they will not see me."

"The country is very amusing," said Porthos, stretching out his legs, which passed through the wooden footboard, and made a tremendous crash, of which, however, no one in the house was capable of taking the slightest notice. By two o'clock in the morning every one was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHOWING WHAT COULD BE SEEN FROM PLANCHET'S HOUSE.

THE next morning found the three heroes sleeping soundly. Trüchen had closed the outside blinds to keep the first rays of the sun from the leaden-lidded eyes of her guests, like a kind, good housekeeper. It was still perfectly dark, then, beneath Porthos's curtains and under Planchet's canopy, when D'Artagnan, awakened by an indiscreet ray of light which made its way through a peek-hole in the shutters, jumped hastily out of bed, as if he wished to be the first at a forlorn hope. He took by assault Porthos's room, which was next to his own. The worthy Porthos was sleeping with a noise like distant thunder; in the dim obscurity of the room his gigantic frame was prominently displayed, and his swollen fist hung down outside the bed upon the carpet. D'Artagnan awoke Porthos, who rubbed his eyes in a tolerably good

humor. In the meantime Planchet was dressing himself, and met at their bedroom doors his two guests, who were still somewhat unsteady from their previous evening's entertainment. Although it was yet very early, the whole household was already up. The cook was mercilessly slaughtering in the poultry-yard; Celestin was gathering white cherries in the garden. Porthos, brisk and lively as ever, held out his hand to Planchet, and D'Artagnan requested permission to embrace Madame Trüchen. The latter, to show that she bore no ill-will, approached Porthos, upon whom she conferred the same favor. Porthos embraced Madame Trüchen, heaving an enormous sigh. Planchet took both his friends by the hand.

"I am going to show you over the house," he said; "when we arrived last night it was as dark as an oven, and we were unable to see anything; but in broad daylight, everything looks different, and you will be satisfied, I hope."

"If we begin by the view you have," said D'Artagnan, "that charms me beyond everything; I have always lived in royal mansions, you know, and royal personages have tolerably sound ideas upon the selection of points of view."

"I am a great stickler for a good view myself," said Porthos. "At my Château de Pierrefonds, I have had four avenues laid out, and at the end of each is a landscape of an altogether different character from the others."

"You shall see *my* prospect," said Planchet; and he led his two guests to a window.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "this is the Rue de Lyon."

"Yes, I have two windows on this side, a paltry insignificant view, for there is always that bustling and noisy inn, which is a very disagreeable neighbor. I had four windows here, but I bricked up two."

"Let us go on," said D'Artagnan.

They entered a corridor leading to the bedrooms, and Planchet pushed open the outside blinds.

"Hollo! what is that out yonder?" said Porthos.

"The forest," said Planchet. "It is the horizon,—a thick line of green, which is yellow in the spring, green in the summer, red in the autumn, and white in the winter."

"All very well, but it is like a curtain, which prevents one seeing a greater distance."

"Yes," said Planchet; "still one can see, at all events, everything that intervenes."

"Ah, the open country," said Porthos. "But what is that I see out there,—crosses and stones?"

"Ah, that is the cemetery," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Precisely," said Planchet, "I assure you it is very curious. Hardly a day passes that some one is not buried there; for Fontainebleau is by no means an inconsiderable place. Sometimes we see young girls clothed in white carrying banners; at others, some of the town-council, or rich citizens, with choristers and all the parish authorities; and then, too, we see some of the officers of the king's household."

"I should not like that," said Porthos.

"There is not much amusement in it, at all events," said D'Artagnan.

"I assure you it encourages religious thoughts," replied Planchet.

"Oh, I don't deny that."

"But," continued Planchet, "we must all die one day or another, and I once met with a maxim somewhere which I have remembered, that the thought of death is a thought that will do us all good."

"I am far from saying the contrary," said Porthos.

"But," objected D'Artagnan, "the thought of green fields, flowers, rivers, blue horizons, extensive and boundless plains, is no less likely to do us good."

"If I had any, I should be far from rejecting them," said Planchet; "but possessing only this little cemetery, full of flowers, so moss-grown, shady, and quiet, I am contented with it, and I think of those who live in town, in the Rue des Lombards, for instance, and who have to listen to the rumbling of a couple of thousand vehicles every day, and to the soulless tramp, tramp, tramp of a hundred and fifty thousand foot passengers."

"But living," said Porthos; "living, remember that."

"That is exactly the reason," said Planchet, timidly, "why, I feel it does me good to contemplate a few dead."

"Upon my word," said D'Artagnan, "that fellow Planchet is born a philosopher as well as a grocer."

"Monsieur," said Planchet, "I am one of those good-humored sort of men whom heaven created for the purpose of living a certain span of days, and of considering all things good they meet with during their transitory stay on earth."

D'Artagnan sat down close to the window, and as there seemed to be something substantial in Planchet's philosophy, he mused over it.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Porthos, "If I am not mistaken, we are going to have a representation now, for I think I heard something like chanting."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "I hear singing too."

"Oh, it is only a burial of a very poor description," said Planchet, disdainfully; "the officiating priest, the beadle, and only one chorister boy, nothing more. You observe, messieurs, that the defunct lady or gentleman could not have been of very high rank."

"No; no one seems to be following the coffin."

"Yes," said Porthos; "I see a man."

"You are right; a man wrapped in a cloak," said D'Artagnan.

"It's not worth looking at," said Planchet.

"I find it interesting," said D'Artagnan, leaning on the window-sill.

"Come, come, you are beginning to take a fancy to the place already," said Planchet, delightedly; "it is exactly my own case. I was so melancholy at first that I could do nothing but make the sign of the cross all day, and the chants were like so many nails being driven into my head; but now, they lull me to sleep, and no bird I have ever seen or heard can sing better than those which are to be met with in this cemetery."

"Well," said Porthos, "this is beginning to get a little dull for me, and I prefer going downstairs."

Planchet with one bound was beside his guest whom he offered to lead into the garden.

"What!" said Porthos to D'Artagnan, as he turned round, "are you going to remain here?"

"Yes, I will join you presently."

"Well, M. D'Artagnan is right, after all," said Planchet: "are they beginning to bury yet?"

"Not yet."

"Ah! yes, the grave-digger is waiting until the cords are fastened round the bier. But, see, a woman has just entered the cemetery at the other end."

"Yes, yes, my dear Planchet," said D'Artagnan, quickly, "leave me, leave me; I feel I am beginning already to be much comforted by my meditations, so do not interrupt me."

Planchet left, and D'Artagnan remained, devouring with his eager gaze from behind the half-closed blinds what was taking place just before him. The two bearers of the corpse had unfastened the straps by which they carried the litter, and were letting their burden glide gently into the open grave. At a few paces distant, the man with the cloak wrapped round him, the only spectator of this melancholy scene, was leaning with his back

against a large cypress-tree, and kept his face and person entirely concealed from the grave-diggers and the priests; the corpse was buried in five minutes. The grave having been filled up, the priests turned away, and the grave-digger having addressed a few words to them, followed them as they moved away. The man in the mantle bowed as they passed him, and put a piece of gold into the grave-digger's hand.

"*Mordious!*" murmured D'Artagnan; "it is Aramis himself."

Aramis, in fact, remained alone, on that side at least; for hardly had he turned his head when a woman's footsteps, and the rustling of her dress, were heard in the path close to him. He immediately turned round, and took off his hat with the most ceremonious respect; he led the lady under the shelter of some walnut and lime trees, which overshadowed a magnificent tomb.

"Ah! who would have thought it," said D'Artagnan; "the bishop of Vannes at a rendezvous! He is still the same Abbé Aramis as he was at Noisy-le-Sec. Yes," he added, after a pause; "but as it is in a cemetery, the rendezvous is sacred." But he almost laughed.

The conversation lasted for fully half an hour. D'Artagnan could not see the lady's face, for she kept her back turned towards him; but he saw perfectly well, by the erect attitude of both the speakers, by their gestures, by the measured and careful manner with which they glanced at each other, either by way of attack or defense, that they must be conversing about any other subject than of love. At the end of the conversation the lady rose, and bowed profoundly to Aramis.

"Oh, oh," said D'Artagnan; "this rendezvous finishes like one of a very tender nature though. The cavalier kneels at the beginning, the young lady by and by gets tamed down, and then it is she who has to supplicate.

Who is this lady. I would give anything to ascertain."

This seemed impossible, however, for Aramis was the first to leave; the lady carefully concealed her head and face, and then immediately departed. D'Artagnan could hold out no longer; he ran to the window which looked out on the Rue de Lyon, and saw Aramis entering the inn. The lady was proceeding in quite an opposite direction, and seemed, in fact, to be about to rejoin an equipage, consisting of two led horses and a carriage, which he could see standing close to the borders of the forest. She was walking slowly, her head bent down, absorbed in the deepest meditation.

"*Mordious! mordious!* I must and will learn who that woman is," said the musketeer again; and then, without further deliberation, he set off in pursuit of her. As he was going along, he tried to think how he could possibly contrive to make her raise her veil. "She is not young," he said, "and is a woman of high rank in society. I ought to know that figure and peculiar style of walk." As he ran, the sound of his spurs and of his boots upon the hard ground of the street made a strange jingling noise; a fortunate circumstance in itself, which he was far from reckoning upon. The noise disturbed the lady; she seemed to fancy she was being either followed or pursued, which was indeed the case, and turned round. D'Artagnan started as if he had received a charge of small shot in his legs, and then turning suddenly round as if he were going back the same way he had come, he murmured, "Madame de Chevreuse!" D'Artagnan would not go home until he had learnt everything. He asked Celestin to inquire of the grave-digger whose body it was they had buried that morning.

"A poor Franciscan mendicant friar," replied the latter, "who had not even a dog to love him in this world, and to accompany him to his last resting-place."

"If that were really the case," thought D'Artagnan, "we should not have found Aramis present at his funeral. The bishop of Vannes is not precisely a dog as far as devotion goes: his scent, however, is quite as keen, I admit."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW PORTHOS, TRÜCHEN, AND PLANCHET PARTED WITH EACH OTHER ON FRIENDLY TERMS, THANKS TO D'ARTAGNAN.

THERE was good living in Planchet's house. Porthos broke a ladder and two cherry-trees, stripped the raspberry-bushes, and was only unable to succeed in reaching the strawberry-beds on account, as he said, of his belt. Trüchen, who had become quite sociable with the giant, said that it was not the belt so much as his corporation; and Porthos, in a state of the highest delight, embraced Trüchen, who gathered him a pailful of the strawberries, and made him eat them out of her hands. D'Artagnan, who arrived in the midst of these little innocent flirtations, scolded Porthos for his indolence, and silently pitied Planchet. Porthos breakfasted with a very good appetite, and when he had finished, he said, looking at Trüchen, "I could make myself very happy here." Trüchen smiled at his remark, and so did Planchet, but not without embarrassment.

D'Artagnan then addressed Porthos:—"You must not let the delights of Capua make you forget the real object of our journey to Fontainebleau."

"My presentation to the king?"

"Certainly. I am going to take a turn in the town to get everything ready for that. Do not think of leaving the house, I beg."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Porthos.

Planchet looked at D'Artagnan nervously.

"Will you be away long?" he inquired.

"No, my friend; and this very evening I will release you from two troublesome guests."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Artagnan! can you say——"

"No, no; you are a noble-hearted fellow, but your house is very small. Such a house, with half a dozen acres of land, would be fit for a king, and make him very happy, too. But you were not born a great lord."

"No more was M. Porthos," murmured Planchet.

"But he has become so, my good fellow; his income has been a hundred thousand francs a year for the last twenty years, and for the last fifty years Porthos has been the owner of a couple of fists and a backbone, which are not to be matched throughout the whole realm of France. Porthos is a man of the very greatest consequence compared to you, and . . . well, I need say no more, for I know you are an intelligent fellow."

"No, no, monsieur, explain what you mean."

"Look at your orchard, how stripped it is, how empty your larder, your bedstead broken, your cellar almost exhausted, look too . . . at Madame Trüchen——"

"Oh! my good gracious!" said Planchet.

"Madame Trüchen is an excellent person," continued D'Artagnan, "but keep her for yourself, do you understand?" and he slapped him on the shoulder.

Planchet at this moment perceived Porthos and Trüchen sitting close together in an arbor; Trüchen, with a grace of manner peculiarly Flemish, was making a pair of earrings for Porthos out of a double cherry, while Porthos was laughing as amorously as Samson in the company of Delilah. Planchet pressed D'Artagnan's hand, and ran towards the arbor. We must do Porthos the justice to say that he did not move as they approached, and, very likely, he did not think he was doing any harm.

Nor indeed did Trüchen move either, which rather put Planchet out; but he, too, had been so accustomed to see fashionable folk in his shop, that he found no difficulty in putting a good countenance on what seemed disagreeable or rude. Planchet seized Porthos by the arm, and proposed to go and look at the horses, but Porthos pretended he was tired. Planchet then suggested that the Baron du Vallon should taste some noyau of his own manufacture, which was not to be equaled anywhere; an offer the baron immediately accepted, and, in this way, Planchet managed to engage his enemy's attention during the whole of the day, by dint of sacrificing his cellar, in preference to his *amour propre*. Two hours afterwards D'Artagnan returned.

"Everything is arranged," he said; "I saw his majesty at the very moment he was setting off for the chase; the king expects us this evening."

"The king expects *me*!" cried Porthos, drawing himself up. It is a sad thing to have to confess, but a man's heart is like an ocean billow; for, from that very moment Porthos ceased to look at Madame Trüchen, in that touching manner which had so softened her heart. Planchet encouraged these ambitious leanings as best he could. He talked over, or rather gave exaggerated accounts of all the splendors of the last reign, its battles, sieges, and grand court ceremonies. He spoke of the luxurious display which the English made; the prizes the three brave companions carried off; and how D'Artagnan, who at the beginning had been the humblest of the four, finished by becoming the leader. He fired Porthos with a generous feeling of enthusiasm by reminding him of his early youth now passed away; he boasted as much as he could of the moral life this great lord had led, and how religiously he respected the ties of friendship; he was eloquent, and skillful in his choice of subjects. He tickled Porthos,

frightened Trüchen, and made D'Artagnan think. At six o'clock, the musketeer ordered the horses to be brought round, and told Porthos to get ready. He thanked Planchet for his kind hospitality, whispered a few words about a post he might succeed in obtaining for him at court, which immediately raised Planchet in Trüchen's estimation, where the poor grocer—so good, so generous, so devoted—had become much lowered ever since the appearance and comparison with him of the two great gentlemen. Such, however, is a woman's nature; they are anxious to possess what they have not got, and disdain it as soon as it is acquired. After having rendered this service to his friend Planchet, D'Artagnan said in a low tone of voice to Porthos: "That is a very beautiful ring you have on your finger."

"It is worth three hundred pistoles," said Porthos.

"Madame Trüchen will remember you better if you leave her that ring," replied D'Artagnan, a suggestion which Porthos seemed to hesitate to adopt.

"You think it is not beautiful enough, perhaps," said the musketeer. "I understand your feelings; a great lord such as you would not think of accepting the hospitality of an old servant without paying him most handsomely for it; but I am sure that Planchet is too good-hearted a fellow to remember that you have an income of a hundred thousand francs a year."

"I have more than half a mind," said Porthos, flattered by the remark, "to make Madame Trüchen a present of my little farm at Bracieux; it has twelve acres."

"It is too much, my good Porthos, too much just at present . . . Keep it for a future occasion." He then took the ring off Porthos's finger, and approaching Trüchen, said to her:—"Madame, monsieur le baron hardly knows how to entreat you, out of your regard for him, to accept this little ring. M. du Vallon is one of the most

generous and discreet men of my acquaintance. He wished to offer you a farm that he has at Bracieux, but I dissuaded him from it."

"Oh!" said Trüchen, looking eagerly at the diamond.

"Monsieur le baron!" exclaimed Planchet, quite overcome.

"My good friend," stammered out Porthos, delighted at having been so well represented by D'Artagnan. These several exclamations, uttered at the same moment, made quite a pathetic winding-up of a day which might have finished in a very ridiculous manner. But D'Artagnan was there, and, on every occasion, wheresoever D'Artagnan exercised any control, matters ended only just in the very way he wished and willed. There were general embracings; Trüchen, whom the baron's munificence had restored to her proper position, very timidly, and blushing all the while, presented her forehead to the great lord with whom she had been on such very pretty terms the evening before. Planchet himself was overcome by a feeling of genuine humility. Still, in the same generosity of disposition, Porthos would have emptied his pockets into the hands of the cook and of Célestin; but D'Artagnan stopped him.

"No," he said, "it is now my turn." And he gave one pistole to the woman and two to the man; and the benedictions which were showered down upon them would have rejoiced the heart of Harpagon himself, and have rendered, even him, a prodigal.

D'Artagnan made Planchet lead them to the château, and introduced Porthos into his own apartment, where he arrived safely without having been perceived by those he was afraid of meeting.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PRESENTATION OF PORTHOS AT COURT.

At seven o'clock the same evening, the king gave an audience to an ambassador from the United Provinces, in the grand reception-room. The audience lasted a quarter of an hour. His majesty afterwards received those who had been recently presented, together with a few ladies, who paid their respects first. In one corner of the salon, concealed behind a column, Porthos and D'Artagnan were conversing together, waiting until their turn arrived.

"Have you heard the news?" inquired the musketeer of his friend.

"No!"

"Well, look, then." Porthos raised himself on tiptoe, and saw M. Fouquet in full court dress, leading Aramis towards the king.

"Aramis!" said Porthos.

"Presented to the king by M. Fouquet."

"Ah!" ejaculated Porthos.

"For having fortified Belle-Isle," continued D'Artagnan.

"And I?"

"You—oh, you! as I have already had the honor of telling you, are the good-natured, kind-hearted Porthos; and so they begged you to take care of Saint-Mandé a little."

"Ah!" repeated Porthos.

"But, happily, I was there," said D'Artagnan, "and presently it will be *my* turn."

At this moment Fouquet addressed the king.

"Sire," he said, "I have a favor to solicit of your majesty. M. d'Herblay is not ambitious, but he knows when he can be of service. Your majesty needs a representative at Rome, who would be able to exercise a powerful influence there; may I request a cardinal's hat for M. d'Herblay?" The king started. "I do not often solicit anything of your majesty," said Fouquet.

"That is a reason, certainly," replied the king, who always expressed any hesitation he might have in that manner, and to which remark there was nothing to say in reply.

Fouquet and Aramis looked at each other. The king resumed: "M. d'Herblay can serve us equally well in France; an archbishopric, for instance."

"Sire," objected Fouquet, with a grace of manner peculiarly his own, "your majesty overwhelms M. d'Herblay; the archbishopric may, in your majesty's extreme kindness, be conferred in addition to the hat; the one does not exclude the other."

The king admired the readiness which he displayed, and smiled, saying: "D'Artagnan himself could not have answered better." He had no sooner pronounced the name than D'Artagnan appeared.

"Did your majesty call me?" he said.

Aramis and Fouquet drew back a step, as if they were about to retire.

"Will your majesty allow me," said D'Artagnan, quickly, as he led forward Porthos, "to present to your majesty M. le Baron du Vallon, one of the bravest gentlemen of France?"

As soon as Aramis saw Porthos, he turned as pale as death, while Fouquet clenched his hands under his ruffles. D'Artagnan smiled blandly at both of them, while Porthos bowed, visibly overcome before the royal presence.

"Porthos here?" murmured Fouquet in Aramis's ear.

"Hush! deep treachery at work," hissed the latter.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "it is more than six years ago I ought to have presented M. du Vallon to your majesty; but certain men resemble stars, they move not one inch unless their satellites accompany them. The Pleiads are never disunited, and that is the reason I have selected, for the purpose of presenting him to you the very moment when you would see M. d'Herblay by his side."

Aramis almost lost countenance. He looked at D'Artagnan with a proud, haughty air, as though willing to accept the defiance the latter seemed to throw down.

"Ah! these gentlemen are good friends, then?" said the king.

"Excellent friends, sire, the one can answer for the other. Ask M. de Vannes now in what manner Belle-Isle was fortified?" Fouquet moved back a step.

"Belle-Isle," said Aramis, coldly, "was fortified by that gentleman," and he indicated Porthos with his hand, who bowed a second time. Louis could not withhold his admiration, though at the same time his suspicions were aroused.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "but ask monsieur le baron whose assistance he had in carrying the works out?"

"Aramis's," said Porthos, frankly; and he pointed to the bishop.

"What the deuce does all this mean," thought the bishop, "and what sort of a termination are we to expect to this comedy?"

"What!" exclaimed the king, "is the cardinal's, I mean this bishop's, name *Aramis*?"

"His *nom de guerre*," said D'Artagnan.

"My nickname," said Aramis.

"A truce to modesty!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "beneath the priest's robe, sire, is concealed the most bril-

liant officer, a gentleman of the most unparalleled intrepidity, and the wisest theologian in your kingdom."

Louis raised his head. "And an engineer, also, it appears," he said, admiring Aramis's calm, imperturbable self-possession.

"An engineer for a particular purpose, sire," said the latter.

"My companion in the musketeers, sire," said D'Artagnan, with great warmth of manner, "the man who has more than a hundred times aided your father's ministers by his advice—M. d'Herblay, in a word, who, with M. du Vallon, myself, and M. le Comtede la Fère, who is known to your majesty, formed that quartette which was a good deal talked about during the late king's reign, and during your majesty's minority."

"And who fortified Belle-Isle?" the king repeated, in a significant tone.

Aramis advanced and bowed: "In order to serve the son as I served the father."

D'Artagnan looked very narrowly at Aramis while he uttered these words, which displayed so much true respect, so much warm devotion, such entire frankness and sincerity, that even he, D'Artagnan, the eternal doubter, he, the almost infallible in judgment, was deceived by it. "A man who lies cannot speak in such a tone as that," he said.

Louis was overcome by it. "In that case," he said to Fouquet, who anxiously awaited the result of this proof, "the cardinal's hat is promised. Monsieur d'Herblay, I pledge you my honor that the first promotion shall be yours. Thank M. Fouquet for it." Colbert overheard these words; they stung him to the quick, and he left the salon abruptly. "And you, Monsieur du Vallon," said the king, "what have you to ask? I am truly pleased to

have it in my power to acknowledge the services of those who were faithful to my father."

"Sire—" began Porthos, but he was unable to proceed with what he was going to say.

"Sire," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this worthy gentleman is utterly overpowered by your majesty's presence, he who so valiantly sustained the looks and the fire of a thousand foes. But, knowing what his thoughts are, I—who am more accustomed to gaze upon the sun—can translate them: he needs nothing, absolutely nothing; his sole desire is to have the happiness of gazing upon your majesty for a quarter of an hour."

"You shall sup with me this evening," said the king, saluting Porthos with a gracious smile.

Porthos became crimson from delight and pride. The king dismissed him, and D'Artagnan pushed him into the adjoining apartment, after he had embraced him warmly.

"Sit next to me at table," said Porthos in his ear.

"Yes, my friend."

"Aramis is annoyed with me, I think."

"Aramis has never liked you so much as he does now. Fancy, it was I who was the means of his getting the cardinal's hat."

"Of course," said Porthos. "By the by, does the king like his guests to eat much at his table?"

"It is a compliment to himself if you do," said D'Artagnan, "for he himself possesses a royal appetite."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

EXPLANATIONS.

ARAMIS cleverly managed to effect a diversion for the purpose of finding D'Artagnan and Porthos. He came up to the latter, behind one of the columns, and, as he pressed his hand, said, "So you have escaped from my prison?"

"Do not scold him," said D'Artagnan; "it was I, dear Aramis, who set him free."

"Ah! my friend," replied Aramis, looking at Porthos, "could you not have waited with a little more patience?"

D'Artagnan came to the assistance of Porthos, who already began to breathe hard, in sore perplexity.

"You see, you members of the Church are great politicians; we, mere soldiers, come at once to the point. The facts are these; I went to pay Baisemeaux a visit—"

Aramis pricked up his ears at this announcement.

"Stay!" said Porthos; "you make me remember that I have a letter from Baisemeaux for you, Aramis." And Porthos held out to the bishop the letter we have already seen. Aramis begged to be allowed to read it, and read it without D'Artagnan feeling in the slightest degree embarrassed by the circumstance that he was so well acquainted with the contents of it. Besides, Aramis's face was so impenetrable, that D'Artagnan could not but admire him more than ever; after he had read it, he put the letter into his pocket with the calmest possible air.

"You were saying, captain?" he observed.

"I was saying," continued the musketeer, "that I had

gone to pay Baisemeaux a visit on his majesty's service."

"On his majesty's service?" said Aramis.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "and, naturally enough, we talked about you and our friends. I must say that Baisemeaux received me coldly; so I soon took my leave of him. As I was returning, a soldier accosted me, and said (no doubt he recognized me, notwithstanding I was in private clothes), "Captain, will you be good enough to read me the name written on this envelope?" and I read, "To Monsieur du Vallon, at M. Fouquet's house, Saint-Mandé." The deuce, said I to myself, Porthos has not returned, then, as I fancied, to Belle-Isle, or to Pierrefonds, but is at M. Fouquet's house, at Saint-Mandé; and as M. Fouquet is not at Saint-Mandé, Porthos must be quite alone, or, at all events, with Aramis; I will go and see Porthos, and I accordingly went to see Porthos."

"Very good," said Aramis, thoughtfully.

"You never told me that," said Porthos.

"I had no time, my friend."

"And you brought back Porthos with you to Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, to Planchet's house."

"Does Planchet live at Fontainebleau?" inquired Aramis.

"Yes, near the cemetery," said Porthos, thoughtlessly.

"What do you mean by 'near the cemetery?'" said Aramis, suspiciously.

"Come," thought the musketeer, "since there is to be a squabble, let us take advantage of it."

"Yes, the cemetery," said Porthos. "Planchet is a very excellent fellow, who makes very excellent preserves; but his house has windows which look out upon the cemetery. And a confoundedly melancholy prospect it is! So this morning——"

"This morning?" said Aramis, more and more excited.

D'Artagnan turned his back to them, and walked to the window, where he began to play a march upon one of the panes of glass.

"Yes, this morning, we saw a man buried there."

"Ah!"

"Very depressing, was it not? I should never be able to live in a house where burials can always be seen from the window. D'Artagnan, on the contrary, seems to like it very much."

"So D'Artagnan saw it as well?"

"Not simply *saw* it; he literally never took his eyes off the whole time."

Aramis started, and turned to look at the musketeer, but the latter was engaged in earnest conversation with Saint-Aignan. Aramis continued to question Porthos, and when he had squeezed all the juice out of this enormous lemon, he threw the peel aside. He turned towards his friend D'Artagnan, and clapping him on the shoulder, when Saint-Aignan had left him, the king's supper having been announced, said, "D'Artagnan."

"Yes, my dear fellow," he replied.

"We do not sup with his majesty, I believe?"

"Well?—*we* do."

"Can you give me ten minutes' conversation?"

"Twenty, if you like. His majesty will take quite that time to get properly seated at table."

"Where shall we talk, then?"

"Here, upon these seats, if you like; the king has left, we can sit down, and the apartment is empty."

"Let us sit down, then."

They sat down, and Aramis took one of D'Artagnan's hands in his.

"Tell me, candidly, my dear friend, whether you have not counseled Porthos to distrust me a little?"

"I admit I have, but not as you understand it. I saw

that Porthos was bored to death, and I wished, by presenting him to the king, to do for him, and for you, what you would never do for yourselves."

"What is that?"

"Speak in your own praise."

"And you have done it most nobly, I thank you."

"And I brought the cardinal's hat a little nearer, just as it seemed to be retreating from you."

"Ah! I admit that," said Aramis, with a singular smile, "you are indeed, not to be matched for making your friends' fortunes for them."

"You see, then, that I only acted with the view of making Porthos's fortune for him."

"I meant to have done that myself; but your arm reaches farther than ours."

It was now D'Artagnan's turn to smile.

"Come," said Aramis, "we ought to deal truthfully with each other. Do you still love me, D'Artagnan?"

"The same as I used to do," replied D'Artagnan, without compromising himself too much by this reply.

"In that case, thanks; and now, for the most perfect frankness," said Aramis; "you visited Belle-Isle on behalf of the king?"

"*Pardieu!*"

"You wished to deprive us of the pleasure of offering Belle-Isle completely fortified to the king."

"But before I could deprive you of that pleasure, I ought to have been made acquainted with your intention of doing so."

"You came to Belle-Isle without knowing anything?"

"Of you! yes. How the devil could I imagine that Aramis had become so clever an engineer, as to be able to fortify like Polybius, or Archimedes?"

"True. And yet you smelt me out over yonder?"

"Oh! yes."

"And Porthos, too?"

"I did not divine that Aramis was an engineer. I was only able to guess that Porthos might have become one. There is a saying, one becomes an orator, one is born a poet; but it has never been said, one is born Porthos, and one becomes an engineer."

"Your wit is always amusing," said Aramis, coldly. "Well, I will go on."

"Do."

"When you found out our secret, you made all the haste you could to communicate it to the king."

"I certainly made as much haste as I could since I saw that you were making still more. When a man weighing two hundred and fifty eight pounds, as Porthos does, rides post; when a gouty prelate—I beg your pardon, but you yourself told me you were so—when a prelate scours the highway—I naturally suppose that my two friends, who did not wish to be communicative with me, had certain matters of the highest importance to conceal from me, and so I made as much haste as my leanness and the absence of gout would allow."

"Did it not occur to you, my dear friend, that you might be rendering Porthos and myself a very sad service?"

"Yes, I thought it not unlikely; but you and Porthos made me play a very ridiculous part at Belle-Isle."

"I beg your pardon," said Aramis.

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan.

"So that," pursued Aramis, "you now know everything?"

"No, indeed."

"You know I was obliged to inform M. Fouquet of what had happened, in order that he would be able to anticipate what you might have to tell the king?"

"That is rather obscure."

"Not at all; M. Fouquet has his enemies—you will admit that, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"And one in particular."

"A dangerous one?"

"A mortal enemy. Well, in order to counteract that man's influence, it was necessary that M. Fouquet should give the king a proof of his great devotion to him, and of his readiness to make the greatest sacrifices. He surprised his majesty by offering him Belle-Isle. If you had been the first to reach Paris, the surprise would have been destroyed, it would have looked as if we had yielded to fear."

"I understand."

"That is the whole mystery," said Aramis, satisfied that he had at last quite convinced the musketeer.

"Only," said the latter, "it would have been more simple to have taken me aside, and said to me, 'My dear D'Artagnan, we are fortifying Belle-Isle, and intend to offer it to the king. Tell us frankly, for whom you are acting. Are you a friend of M. Colbert, or of M. Fouquet?' Perhaps I should not have answered you, but you would have added—'Are you my friend?' I should have said 'Yes.'" Aramis hung down his head. "In this way," continued D'Artagnan, "you would have paralyzed my movements, and I should have gone to the king, and said 'Sire, M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, and exceedingly well, too; but here is a note, which the governor of Belle-Isle gave me for your majesty;" or, 'M. Fouquet is about to wait upon your majesty to explain his intentions with regard to it.' I should not have been placed in an absurd position; you would have enjoyed the surprise so long planned, and we should not have had any occasion to look askant at each other when we met."

"While, on the contrary," replied Aramis, "you have acted altogether as one friendly to M. Colbert. And you really are a friend of his, I suppose?"

"Certainly not, indeed!" exclaimed the captain. "M. Colbert is a mean fellow, and I hate him as I used to hate Mazarin, but without fearing him."

"Well, then," said Aramis, "I love M. Fouquet, and his interests are mine. You know my position. I have no property or means whatever. M. Fouquet gave me several livings, a bishopric as well; M. Fouquet has served and obliged me like the generous-hearted man he is, and I know the world sufficiently well to appreciate a kindness when I meet with one. M. Fouquet has won my regard, and I have devoted myself to his service."

"You could not possibly do better. You will find him a very liberal master."

Aramis bit his lips; and then said, "The best a man could possibly have." He then paused for a minute, D'Artagnan taking good care not to interrupt him.

"I suppose you know how Porthos got mixed up in all this?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "I am curious, of course, but I never question a friend when he wishes to keep a secret from me."

"Well, then, I will tell you."

"It is hardly worth the trouble, if the confidence is to bind me in any way."

"Oh! do not be afraid; there is no man whom I love better than Porthos, because he is so simple-minded and good-natured. Porthos is so straightforward in everything. Since I have become a bishop, I have looked for these primeval natures, which make me love truth and hate intrigue."

D'Artagnan stroked his mustache; but said nothing.

"I saw Porthos and again cultivated his acquaintance;

his own time hanging idly on his hands, his presence recalled my earlier and better days without engaging me in any present evil. I sent for Porthos to come to Vannes. M. Fouquet, whose regard for me is very great, having learnt that Porthos and I were attached to each other by old ties of friendship, promised him increase of rank at the earliest promotion, and that is the whole secret."

"I shall not abuse your confidence," said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of that, my dear friend; no one has a finer sense of honor than yourself."

"I flatter myself you are right, Aramis."

"And now"—and here the prelate looked searchingly and scrutinizingly at his friend—"now let us talk of ourselves and for ourselves; will you become one of M. Fouquet's friends? Do not interrupt me until you know what that means."

"Well, I am listening."

"Will you become a *maréchal* of France, peer, duke, and the possessor of a duchy, with a million of francs?"

"But, my friend," replied D'Artagnan, "what must one do to get all that?"

"Belong to M. Fouquet."

"But I already belong to the king."

"Not exclusively, I suppose."

"Oh! a D'Artagnan cannot be divided."

"You have, I presume, ambitions, as noble hearts like yours have."

"Yes, certainly I have."

"Well?"

"Well! I wish to be a *maréchal*; the king will make me *maréchal*, duke, peer; the king will make me all that."

Aramis fixed a searching look upon D'Artagnan.

"Is not the king master?" said D'Artagnan.

"No one disputes it; but Louis XIII. was master also."

"Oh! my dear friend, between Richelieu and Louis XIII. stood no D'Artagnan," said the musketeer, very quietly.

"There are many stumbling-blocks round the king," said Aramis.

"Not for the king's feet!"

"Very likely not; still——"

"One moment, Aramis; I observe that every one thinks of himself, and never of his poor prince; I will maintain myself maintaining him."

"And if you meet with ingratitude?"

"The weak alone are afraid of that."

"You are quite certain of yourself?"

"I think so."

"Still the king may some day have no further need for you!"

"On the contrary, I think his need of me will soon be greater than ever; and hearken, my dear fellow, if it became necessary to arrest a new Condé, who would do it? This—this alone in France!" and D'Artagnan struck his sword, which clanked sullenly on the tessellated floor.

"You are right," said Aramis, turning very pale; and then he rose and pressed D'Artagnan's hand.

"That is the last summons for supper," said the captain of the musketeers; "will you excuse me?"

Aramis threw his arm round the musketeer's neck, and said, "A friend like you is the brightest jewel in the royal crown." And they immediately separated.

"I was right," mused D'Artagnan; "there is, indeed, something strangely serious stirring."

"We must hasten the explosion," breathes the coming cardinal, "for D'Artagnan has discovered the existence of a plot."

CHAPTER XL.

MADAME AND DE GUICHE.

It will not be forgotten how Comte de Guiche left the queen-mother's apartment on the day when Louis XIV. presented La Vallière with the beautiful bracelets he had won in the lottery. The comte walked to and fro for some time outside the palace, in the greatest distress, from a thousand suspicions and anxieties with which his mind was beset. Presently he stopped and waited on the terrace opposite the grove of trees, watching for Madame's departure. More than half an hour passed away; and as he was at that moment quite alone, the comte could hardly have had any very diverting ideas at his command. He drew his tablets from his pocket, and, after hesitating over and over again, determined to write these words:—"Madame, I implore you to grant me one moment's conversation. Do not be alarmed at this request, which contains nothing in any way opposed to the profound respect with which I subscribe myself, etc, etc." He had signed and folded this singular love-letter, when he suddenly observed several ladies leaving the château, and afterwards several courtiers too; in fact almost every one that formed the queen's circle. He saw La Vallière herself, then Montalais talking with Malicorne; he watched the departure of the very last of the numerous guests that had a short time before thronged the queen-mother's cabinet.

Madame herself had not yet passed; she would be obliged, however, to cross the courtyard in order to enter her own apartments; and, from the terrace where he was

standing, De Guiche could see all that was going on in the courtyard. At last he saw Madame leave, attended by a couple of pages, who were carrying torches before her. She was walking very quickly; as soon as she reached the door, she said:

"Let some one go and look for De Guiche, he has to render an account of a mission he had to discharge for me; if he should be disengaged, request him to be good enough to come to my apartment."

De Guiche remained silent, hidden in the shade; but, as soon as Madame had withdrawn, he darted from the terrace down the steps, and assumed a most indifferent air, so that the pages who were hurrying towards his rooms might meet him.

"Ah! it is Madame then who is seeking me!" he said to himself, quite overcome; and he crushed in his hand the now worse than useless letter.

"M. le Comte," said one of the pages, approaching him, "we are indeed most fortunate in meeting you."

"Why so, messieurs?"

"A command from Madame."

"From Madame!" said De Guiche, looking surprised.

"Yes, M. le Comte, her royal highness has been asking for you; she expects to hear, she told us, the result of a commission you had to execute for her. Are you at liberty?"

"I am quite at her royal highness's orders."

"Will you have the goodness to follow us, then?"

When De Guiche entered the princess's apartments, he found her pale and agitated. Montalais was standing at the door, evidently uneasy about what was passing in her mistress's mind. De Guiche appeared.

"Ah! is that you, Monsieur de Guiche?" said Madame; "come in, I beg. Mademoiselle de Montalais, I do not require your attendance any longer."

Montalais, more puzzled than ever, courtesied and withdrew. De Guiche and the princess were left alone. The comte had every advantage in his favor; it was Madame who had summoned him to a rendezvous. But how was it possible for the comte to make use of this advantage? Madame was so whimsical, and her disposition so changeable. She soon allowed this to be perceived, for, suddenly opening the conversation, she said: "Well! have you nothing to say to me?"

He imagined she must have guessed his thoughts; he fancied (for those who are in love are thus constituted, being as credulous and blind as poets or prophets), he fancied she knew how ardent was his desire to see her, and also the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Yes, madame," he said, "and I think it very singular."

"The affair of the bracelets," she exclaimed, eagerly, "you mean that, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame."

"And you think the king is in love; do you not?"

Guiche looked at her for some time; her eyes sank under his gaze, which seemed to read her very heart.

"I think," he said, "that the king may possibly have had an idea of annoying some one; were it not for that, the king would hardly show himself so earnest in his attentions as he is; he would not run the risk of compromising, from mere thoughtlessness of disposition, a young girl against whom no one has been hitherto able to say a word."

"Indeed! the bold, shameless girl," said the princess, haughtily.

"I can positively assure your royal highness," said De Guiche, with a firmness marked by great respect, "that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by a man who merits every respect, for he is a brave and honorable gentleman."

"Bragelonne?"

"My friend; yes, madame."

"Well, and though he is your friend, what does that matter to the king?"

"The king knows that Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and as Raoul has served the king most valiantly, the king will not inflict an irreparable injury upon him."

Madame began to laugh in a manner that produced a sinister impression upon De Guiche.

"I repeat, madame, I do not believe the king is in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and the proof that I do not believe it is, that I was about to ask you whose *amour propre* it is likely the king is desirous of wounding? You who are well acquainted with the whole court, can perhaps assist me in ascertaining that; and assuredly, with greater certainty, since it is everywhere said that your royal highness is on very friendly terms with the king."

Madame bit her lips, and, unable to assign any good and sufficient reasons, changed the conversation. "Prove to me," she said, fixing on him one of those looks in which the whole soul seems to pass into the eyes, "prove to me, I say, that you intended to interrogate me at the very moment I sent for you."

De Guiche gravely drew from his pocket the now crumpled note that he had written, and showed it to her.

"Sympathy," she said.

"Yes," said the comte, with an indescribable tenderness of tone, "sympathy. I have explained to you how and why I sought you; you, however, have yet to tell me, madame, why you sent for me."

"True," replied the princess. She hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Those bracelets will drive me mad."

"You expected the king would offer them to you," replied De Guiche.

"Why not?"

"But before you, madame, before you, his sister-in-law, was there not the queen herself to whom the king should have offered them?"

"Before La Vallière," cried the princess, wounded to the quick, "could he not have presented them to me? Was there not the whole court, indeed, to choose from?"

"I assure you, madame," said the comte, respectfully. "that if any one heard you speak in this manner, if any one were to see how red your eyes are, and, Heaven forgive me, to see, too, that tear trembling on your eyelids, it would be said that your royal highness was jealous."

"Jealous!" said the princess, haughtily—"jealous of La Vallière!"

She expected to see De Guiche yield beneath her scornful gesture and her proud tone; but he simply and boldly replied, "Jealous of La Vallière; yes, madame."

"Am I to suppose, monsieur," she stammered out, "that your object is to insult me?"

"It is not possible, madame," replied the comte, slightly agitated, but resolved to master that fiery nature.

"Leave the room!" said the princess, thoroughly exasperated; De Guiche's coolness and silent respect having made her completely lose her temper.

De Guiche fell back a step, bowed slowly, but with great respect, drew himself up, looking as white as his lace cuffs, and, in a voice slightly trembling, said, "It was hardly worth while to have hurried here to be subjected to this unmerited disgrace." And he turned away with hasty steps.

He had scarcely gone half a dozen paces when Madame darted like a tigress after him, seized him by the cuff, and making him turn round again, said, trembling with passion

as she did so, "The respect you pretend to have is more insulting than the insult itself. Insult me, if you please, but at least speak."

"Madame," said the comte, gently, as he drew his sword, "thrust this blade into my heart, rather than kill me by degrees."

At the look he fixed upon her,—a look full of love, resolution, and despair even,—she knew how readily the comte, so outwardly calm in appearance, would pass his sword through his own breast if she added another word. She tore the blade from his hands, and, pressing his arm with a feverish impatience, which might pass for tenderness, said, "Do not be too hard upon me, comte. You see how I am suffering, and yet you have no pity for me."

Tears, the crisis of this strange attack, stifled her voice. As soon as De Guiche saw her weep, he took her in his arms and carried her to an arm-chair; in another moment she would have been suffocated.

"Oh, why," he murmured, as he knelt by her side, "why do you conceal your troubles from me? Do you love any one—tell me? It would kill me, I know, but not until I should have comforted, consoled, and served you even."

"And do you love me to that extent?" she replied, completely conquered.

"I do indeed love you to that extent, madame."

She placed both her hands in his. "My heart is indeed another's," she murmured in so low a tone that her voice could hardly be heard; but he heard it, and said, "Is it the king you love?"

She gently shook her head, and her smile was like a clear bright streak in the clouds, through which after the tempest has passed one almost fancies Paradise is opening. "But," she added, "there are other passions in a high-born heart. Love is poetry; but the real life of the heart is pride. Comte, I was born on a throne, I am proud and

jealous of my rank. Why does the king gather such unworthy objects round him?"

"Once more, I repeat," said the comte, "you are acting unjustly towards that poor girl, who will one day be my friend's wife."

"Are you simple enough to believe that, comte?"

"If I did not believe it," he said, turning very pale, "Bragelonne should be informed of it to-morrow; indeed he should, if I thought that poor La Vallière had forgotten the vows she had exchanged with Raoul. But no, it would be cowardly to betray a woman's secret; it would be criminal to disturb a friend's peace of mind."

"You think, then," said the princess, with a wild burst of laughter, "that ignorance is happiness?"

"I believe it," he replied.

"Prove it to me, then," she said, hurriedly.

"It is easily done, madame. It is reported through the whole court that the king loves you, and that you return his affection."

"Well?" she said, breathing with difficulty.

"Well; admit for a moment that Raoul, my friend, had come and said to me, 'Yes, the king loves Madame, and has made an impression upon her heart,' I possibly should have slain Raoul."

"It would have been necessary," said the princess, with the obstinacy of a woman who feels herself not easily overcome, "for M. de Bragelonne to have had proofs, before he ventured to speak to you in that manner."

"Such, however, is the case," replied De Guiche, with a deep sigh, "that not having been warned, I have never examined into the matter seriously; and I now find that my ignorance has saved my life."

"So, then, you drive selfishness and coldness to that extent," said Madame, "that you would let this unhappy young man continue to love La Vallière?"

"I would, until La Vallière's guilt were revealed."

"But the bracelets?"

"Well, madame, since you yourself expected to receive them from the king, what can I possibly say?"

The argument was a telling one, and the princess was overwhelmed by it, and from that moment her defeat was assured. But as her heart and mind were instinct with noble and generous feelings, she understood De Guiche's extreme delicacy. She saw that in his heart he really suspected that the king was in love with La Vallière, and that he did not wish to resort to the common expedient of ruining a rival in the mind of a woman, by giving the latter the assurance and certainty that this rival's affections were transferred to another woman. She guessed that his suspicions of La Vallière were aroused, and that, in order to leave himself time for his convictions to undergo a change, so as not to ruin Louise utterly, he was determined to pursue a certain straightforward line of conduct. She could read so much real greatness of character, and such true generosity of disposition in her lover, that her heart really warmed with affection towards him, whose passion for her was so pure and delicate. Despite his fear of incurring her displeasure, De Guiche, by retaining his position as a man of proud independence of feeling and deep devotion, became almost a hero in her estimation, and reduced her to the state of a jealous and little-minded woman. She loved him for this so tenderly, that she could not refuse to give him a proof of her affection.

"See, how many words we have wasted," she said, taking his hand, "suspicions, anxieties, mistrust, sufferings—I think we have enumerated all those words."

"Alas! madame, yes."

"Efface them from your heart as I drive them from mine. Whether La Vallière does or does not love the

king, and whether the king does or does not love La Val-
lière,—from this moment you and I will draw a distinc-
tion, in the two characters I have to perform. You open
your eyes so wide that I am sure you hardly understand
me.”

“You are so impetuous, madame, that I always tremble
at the fear of displeasing you.”

“And see how he trembles now, poor fellow,” she said,
with the most charming playfulness of manner. “Yes,
monsieur, I have two characters to perform. I am the
sister of the king, the sister-in-law of the king’s wife. In
this character ought I not to take an interest in these
domestic intrigues? Come, tell me what you think?”

“As little as possible, madame.”

“Agreed, monsieur; but it is a question of dignity; and
then, you know, I am the wife of the king’s brother.”
De Guiche sighed. “A circumstance,” she added, with an
expression of great tenderness, “which will remind you
that I am always to be treated with the profoundest
respect.” De Guiche fell at her feet, which he kissed, with
the religious fervor of a worshipper. “And I begin to
think that, really and truly, I have another character
to perform. I was almost forgetting it.”

“Name it, oh! name it,” said De Guiche.

“I am a woman,” she said, in a voice lower than ever,
“and I love.” He rose, she opened her arms, and their
lips met. A footstep was heard behind the tapestry, and
Mademoiselle de Montalais appeared.

“What do you want?” said Madame.

“M. de Guiche is wanted,” replied Montalais, who was
just in time to see the agitation of the actors of these four
characters; for De Guiche had consistently carried out his
part with heroism.

CHAPTER XLI.

MONTALAIS AND MALICORNE.

MONTALAIS was right. M. de Guiche, thus summoned in every direction, was very much exposed, from such a multiplication of business, to the risk of not attending to any. It so happened that, considering the awkwardness of the interruption, Madame, notwithstanding her wounded pride, and her secret anger, could not, for the moment at least, reproach Montalais for having violated, in so bold a manner, the semi-royal order with which she had been dismissed on De Guiche's entrance. De Guiche, also, lost his presence of mind, or, it would be more correct to say had already lost it, before Montalais's arrival, for, scarcely had he heard the young girl's voice, than, without taking leave of Madame, as the most ordinary politeness required, even between persons equal in rank and station, he fled from her presence, his heart tumultuously throbbing, and his brain on fire, leaving the princess with one hand raised, as though about to bid him adieu. Montalais was at no loss, therefore, to perceive the agitation of the two lovers—the one who fled was agitated, and the one who remained was equally so.

"Well," murmured the young girl, as she glanced inquisitively round her, "this time, at least, I think I know as much as the most curious woman could possibly wish to know." Madame felt so embarrassed by this inquisitorial look, that, as if she had heard Montalais's muttered side remark, she did not speak a word to her maid of honor, but, casting down her eyes, retired at once to her bedroom. Montalais, observing this, stood listening for

a moment, and then heard Madame lock and bolt her door. By this she knew that the rest of the evening was at her own disposal; and making, behind the door which had just been closed, a gesture which indicated but little real respect for the princess, she went down the staircase in search of Malicorne, who was very busily engaged at that moment in watching a courier, who, covered with dust, had just left the Comte de Guiche's apartments. Montalais knew that Malicorne was engaged in a matter of some importance; she therefore allowed him to look and stretch out his neck as much as he pleased; and it was only when Malicorne had resumed his natural position, that she touched him on the shoulder. "Well," said Montalais, "what is the latest intelligence you have?"

"M. de Guiche is in love with Madame."

"Fine news, truly! I know something more recent than that."

"Well, what do you know?"

"That Madame is in love with M. de Guiche."

"The one is the consequence of the other."

"Not always, my good monsieur."

"Is that remark intended for me?"

"Present company always excepted."

"Thank you," said Malicorne. "Well, and in the other direction, what is stirring?"

"The king wished, this evening, after the lottery, to see Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well, and he has seen her?"

"No, indeed!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"The door was shut and locked."

"So that——"

"So that the king was obliged to go back again, looking very sheepish, like a thief who has forgotten his crowbar."

"Good."

"And in the third place?" inquired Montalais.

"The courier who has just arrived for De Guiche came from M. de Bragelonne."

"Excellent," said Montalais, clapping her hands together.

"Why so?"

"Because we have work to do. If we get weary now, something unlucky will be sure to happen."

"We must divide the work, then," said Malicorne, "in order to avoid confusion."

"Nothing easier," replied Montalais. "Three intrigues, carefully nursed, and carefully encouraged, will produce, one with another, and taking a low average, three love letters a day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Malicorne, shrugging his shoulders, "you cannot mean what you say, darling; three letters a day, that may do for sentimental common people. A musketeer on duty, a young girl in a convent, may exchange letters with their lovers once a day, perhaps, from the top of a ladder, or through a hole in the wall. A letter contains all the poetry their poor little hearts have to boast of. But the cases we have in hand require to be dealt with very differently."

"Well, finish," said Montalais, out of patience with him. "Some one may come."

"Finish! Why, I am only at the beginning. I have still three points as yet untouched."

"Upon my word, he will be the death of me, with his Flemish indifference," exclaimed Montalais.

"And you will drive me mad with your Italian vivacity. I was going to say that our lovers here will be writing volumes to each other. But what are you driving at?"

"At this. Not one of our lady correspondents will be able to keep the letters they may receive."

"Very likely not."

"M. de Guiche will not be able to keep his either."

"That is probable."

"Very well, then ; I will take care of all that."

"That is the very thing that is impossible," said Malicorne.

"Why so ?"

"Because you are not your own mistress ; your room is as much La Vallière's as yours ; and there are certain persons who will think nothing of visiting and searching a maid of honor's room ; so that I am terribly afraid of the queen, who is as jealous as a Spaniard ; of the queen-mother, who is as jealous as a couple of Spaniards ; and, last of all, of Madame herself, who has jealousy enough for ten Spaniards."

"You forget some one else ?"

"Who ?"

"Monsieur."

"I was only speaking of the women. Let us add them up, then : we will call Monsieur, No. 1."

"De Guiche ?"

"No. 2."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne ?"

"No. 3."

"And the king, the king ?"

"No. 4. Of course the king, who not only will be more jealous, but more powerful than all the rest put together. Ah, my dear !"

"Well ?"

"Into what a wasp's nest you have thrust yourself !"

"And as yet not quite far enough, if you will follow me into it."

"Most certainly I will follow you where you like. Yet——"

"Well, yet——"

"While we have time, I think it will be prudent to turn back."

"But I, on the contrary, think the wisest course to take is to put ourselves at once at the head of all these intrigues."

"You will never be able to do it."

"With you, I could superintend ten of them. I am in my element, you must know. I was born to live at the court, as the salamander is made to live in the fire."

"Your comparison does not reassure me in the slightest degree in the world, my dear Montalais. I have heard it said, and by learned men too, that, in the first place, there are no salamanders at all, and that, if there had been any, they would have been infallibly baked or roasted on leaving the fire."

"Your learned men may be very wise as far as salamanders are concerned, but they would never tell you what I can tell you; namely, that Aure de Montalais is destined, before a month is over, to become the first diplomatist in the court of France."

"Be it so, but on condition that I shall be the second."

"Agreed; an offensive and defensive alliance, of course."

"Only be very careful of any letters."

"I will hand them to you as I receive them."

"What shall we tell the king about Madame?"

"That Madame is still in love with his majesty."

"What shall we tell Madame about the king?"

"That she would be exceedingly wrong not to humor him."

"What shall we tell La Vallière about Madame?"

"Whatever we choose, for La Vallière is in our power."

"How so?"

"Every way."

"What do you mean?"

"In the first place, through the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Explain yourself."

"You do not forget, I hope, that Monsieur de Bragelonne has written many letters to Mademoiselle de Valière?"

"I forget nothing."

"Well, then, it was I who received, and I who intercepted those letters."

"And, consequently, it is you who have them still?"

"Yes."

"Where,—here?"

"Oh, no: I have them safe at Blois, in the little room you know well enough."

"That dear little room,—that darling little room, the antechamber of the palace I intend you to live in one of these days. But, I beg your pardon, you said that all those letters are in that little room?"

"Yes."

"Did you not put them in a box?"

"Of course; in the same box where I put all the letters I received from you, and where I put mine also when your business or your amusements prevented you from coming to our rendezvous."

"Ah, very good," said Malicorne.

"Why are you so satisfied?"

"Because I see there is a possibility of not having to run to Blois after the letters, for I have them here."

"You have brought the box away?"

"It was very dear to me, because it belonged to you."

"Be sure and take care of it, for it contains original documents that will be of priceless value by and by."

"I am perfectly well aware of that indeed, and that is the very reason why I laugh as I do, and with all my heart too."

"And now, one last word."

"Why, *last*?"

"Do we need any one to assist us?"

"No one."

"Valets or maid-servants?"

"Bad policy. You will give the letters,—you will receive them. Oh! we must have no pride in this affair, otherwise M. Malicorne and Mademoiselle Aure, not transacting their own affairs themselves, will have to make up their minds to see them done by others."

"You are quite right; but what is going on yonder in M. de Guiche's room?"

"Nothing; he is only opening his window."

"Let us be gone." And they both immediately disappeared, all the terms of the compact being agreed on.

The window just opened was, in fact, that of the Comte de Guiche. It was not alone with the hope of catching a glimpse of Madame through her curtains that he seated himself by the open window, for his preoccupation of mind had at that time a different origin. He had just received, as we have already stated, the courier who had been dispatched to him by Bragelonne, the latter having written to De Guiche a letter which had made the deepest impression upon him, and which he had read over and over again. "Strange, strange!" he murmured. "How irresponsible are the means by which destiny hurries men onward to their fate!" Leaving the window in order to approach nearer to the light, he once more read the letter he had just received:—

"CALAIS.

"MY DEAR COUNT—I found M. de Wardes at Calais; he has been seriously wounded in an affair with the Duke of Buckingham. De Wardes is, as you know, unquestionably brave, but full of malevolent and wicked feelings. He conversed with me about yourself, for whom, he says,

he has a warm regard, also about Madame, whom he considers a beautiful and amiable woman. He has guessed your affection for a certain person. He also talked to me about the lady for whom I have so ardent a regard, and showed the greatest interest on my behalf in expressing a deep pity for me, accompanied, however, by dark hints which alarmed me at first, but which I at last looked upon as the result of his usual love of mystery. These are the facts : he had received news of the court ; you will understand, however, that it was only through M. de Lorraine. The report goes, so says the news, that a change has taken place in the king's affections. You know whom that concerns. Afterwards, the news continues, people are talking about one of the maids of honor, respecting whom various slanderous reports are being circulated. These vague phrases have not allowed me to sleep. I have been deploring, ever since yesterday, that my diffidence and vacillation of purpose, notwithstanding a certain obstinacy of character I may possess, have left me unable to reply to these insinuations. In a word, M. de Wardes was setting off for Paris, and I did not delay his departure with explanations ; for it seemed rather hard, I confess, to cross-examine a man whose wounds are hardly yet closed. In short, he travelled by short stages, as he was anxious to leave, he said, in order to be present at a curious spectacle the court cannot fail to offer within a short time. He added a few congratulatory words accompanied by vague sympathizing expressions. I could not understand the one any more than the other. I was bewildered by my own thoughts, and tormented by a mistrust of this man,—a mistrust which, you know better than any one else, I have never been able to overcome. As soon as he left, my perceptions seemed to become clearer. It is hardly possible that a man of De Wardes' character should not have communicated something of

his own malicious nature to the statements he made to me. It is not unlikely, therefore, that in the strange hints De Wardes threw out in my presence, there may be a mysterious signification, which I might have some difficulty in applying either to myself or to some one with whom you are acquainted. Being compelled to leave as soon as possible, in obedience to the king's commands, the idea did not occur to me of running after De Wardes in order to ask him to explain his reserve; but I have dispatched a courier to you with this letter, which will explain in detail my various doubts. I regard you as myself; you have reflected and observed; it will be for you to act. M. de Wardes will arrive very shortly; endeavor to learn what he meant, if you do not already know. M. de Wardes, moreover, pretended that the Duke of Buckingham left Paris on the very best of terms with Madame. This was an affair which would have unhesitatingly made me draw my sword, had I not felt that I was under the necessity of dispatching the king's mission before undertaking any quarrel whatsoever. Burn this letter, which Olivian will hand you. Whatever Olivian says, you may confidently rely on. Will you have the goodness, my dear comte, to recall me to the remembrance of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose hands I kiss with the greatest respect.

"Your devoted,

DE BRAGELONNE.

"P. S.—If anything serious should happen—we should be prepared for everything—dispatch a courier to me with this one single word, 'Come,' and I will be in Paris within six-and-thirty hours after the receipt of your letter."

De Guiche sighed, folded the letter up a third time, and, instead of burning it, as Raoul had recommended him to

do, placed it in his pocket. He felt it needed reading over and over again.

"How much distress of mind, yet what sublime confidence, he shows!" murmured the comte; "he has poured out his whole soul in this letter. He says nothing of the Comte de la Fère, and speaks of his respect for Louise. He cautions me on my own account, and entreats me on his. Ah!" continued De Guiche, with a threatening gesture, "you interfere in my affairs, Monsieur de Wardes, do you? Very well, then; I will shortly occupy myself with yours. As for you, poor Raoul,—you who intrust your heart to my keeping, be assured I will watch over it."

With this promise, De Guiche begged Malicorne to come immediately to his apartments, if possible. Malicorne acknowledged the invitation with an activity which was the first result of his conversation with Montalais. And while De Guiche, who thought that his motive was undiscovered, cross-examined Malicorne, the latter, who appeared to be working in the dark, soon guessed his questioner's motives. The consequence was, that, after a quarter of an hour's conversation, during which De Guiche thought he had ascertained the whole truth with regard to La Vallière and the king, he had learned absolutely nothing more than his own eyes had already acquainted him with, while Malicorne learned, or guessed, that Raoul, who was absent, was fast becoming suspicious, and that De Guiche intended to watch over the treasure of the Hesperides. Malicorne accepted the office of dragon. De Guiche fancied he had done everything for his friend, and soon began to think of nothing but his personal affairs. The next evening, De Wardes' return and first appearance at the king's reception were announced. When that visit had been paid, the convalescent waited on Monsieur; De Guiche taking care, however, to be at Monsieur's apartments before the visit took place.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOW DE WARDES WAS RECEIVED AT COURT.

MONSIEUR had received De Wardes with that marked favor light and frivolous minds bestow on every novelty that comes in their way. De Wardes, who had been absent for a month, was like fresh fruit to him. To treat him with marked kindness was an infidelity to old friends, and there is always something fascinating in that; moreover, it was a sort of reparation to De Wardes himself. Nothing, consequently, could exceed the favorable notice Monsieur took of him. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who feared this rival not a little, but who respected a character and disposition only too parallel to his own in every particular, with the addition of a bull-dog courage he did not himself possess, received De Wardes with a greater display of regard and affection than even Monsieur had done. De Guiche, as we have said, was there also, but kept in the background, waiting very patiently until all these interchanges were over. De Wardes, while talking to the others, and even to Monsieur himself, had not for a moment lost sight of De Guiche, who, he instinctively felt, was there on his account. As soon as he had finished with the others, he went up to De Guiche. They exchanged the most courteous compliments, after which De Wardes returned to Monsieur and the other gentlemen.

In the midst of these congratulations Madame was announced. She had been informed of De Wardes' arrival and knowing all the details of his voyage and duel, she was not sorry to be present at the remarks she knew would be made, without delay, by one who, she felt assured,

was her personal enemy. Two or three of her ladies accompanied her. De Wardes saluted Madame in the most graceful and respectful manner, and, as a commencement of hostilities, announced, in the first place, that he could furnish the Duke of Buckingham's friends with the latest news about him. This was a direct answer to the coldness with which Madame had received him. The attack was a vigorous one, and Madame felt the blow, but without appearing to have even noticed it. He rapidly cast a glance at Monsieur and at De Guiche,—the former colored, and the latter turned very pale. Madame alone preserved an unmoved countenance; but, as she knew how many unpleasant thoughts and feelings her enemy could awaken in the two persons who were listening to him, she smilingly bent forward toward the traveler, as if to listen to the news he had brought—but he was speaking of other matters. Madame was brave, even to imprudence; if she were to retreat, it would be inviting an attack; so, after the first disagreeable impression had passed away, she returned to the charge.

"Have you suffered much from your wounds, Monsieur de Wardes?" she inquired, "for we have been told that you had the misfortune to get wounded."

It was now De Wardes' turn to wince; he bit his lips, and replied, "No, madame, hardly at all."

"Indeed! and yet in this terribly hot weather——"

"The sea-breezes were very fresh and cool, madame, and then I had one consolation."

"Indeed! What was it?"

"The knowledge that my adversary's sufferings were still greater than my own."

"Ah! you mean he was more seriously wounded than you were; I was not aware of that," said the princess, with utter indifference.

"Oh, madame, you are mistaken, or rather you pretend

to misunderstand my remark. I did not say that he was a greater sufferer in body than myself; but his heart was very seriously affected."

De Guiche comprehended instinctively from what direction the struggle was approaching; he ventured to make a sign to Madame, as if entreating her to retire from the contest. But she, without acknowledging De Guiche's gesture, without pretending to have noticed it even, and still smiling, continued,—

"Is it possible," she said, "that the Duke of Buckingham's heart was touched? I had no idea, until now, that a heart-wound could be cured."

"Alas! madame," replied De Wardes, politely, "every woman believes that; and it is this belief that gives them that superiority to man which confidence begets."

"You misunderstand altogether, dearest," said the prince, impatiently; "M. de Wardes means that the Duke of Buckingham's heart had been touched, not by the sword but by something sharper."

"Ah! very good, very good!" exclaimed Madame. "It is a jest of M. de Wardes'. Very good; but I should like to know if the Duke of Buckingham would appreciate the jest. It is, indeed, a very great pity he is not here, M. de Wardes."

The young man's eyes seemed to flash fire. "Oh!" he said, as he clenched his teeth, "there is nothing I should like better."

De Guiche did not move. Madame seemed to expect that he would come to her assistance. Monsieur hesitated. The Chevalier de Lorraine advanced and continued the conversation.

"Madame," he said, "De Wardes knows perfectly well that for a Buckingham's heart to be touched is nothing new, and what he has said has already taken place."

"Instead of an ally, I have two enemies," murmured

Madame; "two determined enemies, and in league with each other." And she changed the conversation. To change the conversation is, as every one knows, a right possessed by princes which etiquette requires all to respect. The remainder of the conversation was moderate enough in tone; the principal actors had rehearsed their parts. Madame withdrew early, and Monsieur, who wished to question her on several matters, offered her his hand on leaving. The chevalier was seriously afraid that an understanding might be established between the husband and wife if he were to leave them quietly together. He therefore made his way to Monsieur's apartments, in order to surprise him on his return, and to destroy with a few words all the good impressions Madame might have been able to sow in his heart. De Guiche advanced towards De Wardes, who was surrounded by a large number of persons, and thereby indicated his wish to converse with him; De Wardes, at the same time, showing by his looks and by a movement of his head that he perfectly understood him. There was nothing in these signs to enable strangers to suppose they were otherwise than upon the most friendly footing. De Guiche could therefore turn away from him, and wait until he was at liberty. He had not long to wait; for De Wardes, freed from his questioners, approached De Guiche, and after a fresh salutation, they walked side by side together.

"You have made a good impression since your return, my dear De Wardes," said the comte.

"Excellent, as you see."

"And your spirits are just as lively as ever?"

"Better."

"And a very great happiness, too."

"Why not? Everything is so ridiculous in this world, everything so absurd around us."

"You are right."

"You are of my opinion, then?"

"I should think so! And what news do you bring us from yonder?"

"I? None at all. I have come to look for news here."

"But, tell me, you surely must have seen some people at Boulogne, one of our friends, for instance; it is no great time ago?"

"Some people—one of our friends——"

"Your memory is short."

"Ah! true; Bragelonne, you mean."

"Exactly so."

"Who was on his way to fulfil a mission, with which he was entrusted to King Charles II."

"Precisely. Well, then, did he not tell you, or did not you tell him——"

"I do not precisely know what I told him, I must confess: but I do know what I did *not* tell him." De Wardes was *finesse* itself. He perfectly well knew from De Guiche's tone and manner, which was cold and dignified, that the conversation was about to assume a disagreeable turn. He resolved to let it take what course it pleased, and to keep strictly on his guard.

"May I ask what it was you did not tell him?" inquired De Guiche.

"All about La Vallière."

"La Vallière. . . What is it? and what was that strange circumstance you seem to have known over yonder, which Bragelonne, who was here on the spot, was not acquainted with?"

"Do you really ask me that in a serious manner?"

"Nothing more so."

"What! you, a member of the court, living in Madame's household, a friend of Monsieur's, a guest at their table, the favorite of our lovely princess?"

Guiche colored violently from anger. "What princess are you alluding to?" he said.

"I am only acquainted with one, my dear fellow. I am speaking of Madame herself. Are you devoted to another princess, then? Come, tell me."

De Guiche was on the point of launching out, but he saw the drift of the remark. A quarrel was imminent between the two young men. De Wardes wished the quarrel to be only in Madame's name, while De Guiche would not accept it except on La Vallière's account. From this moment, it became a series of feigned attacks, which would have continued until one of the two had been touched home. De Guiche therefore resumed all the self-possession he could command.

"There is not the slightest question in the world of Madame in this matter, my dear De Wardes," said Guiche, "but simply of what you were talking about just now."

"What was I saying?"

"That you had concealed certain things from Bragelonne."

"Certain things which you know as well as I do," replied De Wardes.

"No, upon my honor."

"Nonsense."

"If you tell me what they are, I shall know, but not otherwise, I swear."

"What! I, who have just arrived from a distance of sixty leagues, and you who have not stirred from this place, who have witnessed with your own eyes that which rumor informed me of at Calais! Do you now tell me seriously that you do not know what it is about? Oh! comte, this is hardly charitable of you."

"As you like, De Wardes; but I again repeat, I know nothing."

"You are truly discreet—well!—perhaps it is very prudent of you."

"And so you will not tell me anything, will not tell me any more than you told Bragelonne?"

"You are pretending to be deaf, I see. I am convinced that Madame could not possibly have more command over herself than *you* have."

"Double hypocrite," murmured De Guiche to himself, "you are again returning to the old subject."

"Very well, then," continued De Wardes, "since we find it so difficult to understand each other about La Vallière and Bragelonne, let us speak about your own affairs."

"Nay," said De Guiche, "I have no affairs of my own to talk about. You have not said anything about me, I suppose, to Bragelonne, which you cannot repeat to my face?"

"No; but understand me, Guiche, that however much I may be ignorant of certain matters, I am quite as conversant with others. If, for instance, we were conversing about the intimacies of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris, as I did during my journey with the duke, I could tell you a great many interesting circumstances. Would you like me to mention them?"

De Guiche passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "No, no," he said, "a hundred times no! I have no curiosity for matters which do not concern me. The Duke of Buckingham is for me nothing more than a simple acquaintance, whilst Raoul is an intimate friend. I have not the slightest curiosity to learn what happened to the duke, while I have, on the contrary, the greatest interest in all that happened to Raoul."

"In Paris?"

"Yes, in Paris, or Boulogne. You understand, I am on

the spot; if anything should happen, I am here to meet it; whilst Raoul is absent, and has only myself to represent him; so, Raoul's affairs before my own."

"But he will return?"

"Not, however, until his mission is completed. In the meantime, you understand, evil reports cannot be permitted to circulate about him without my looking into them."

"And for a better reason still, that he will remain some time in London," said De Wardes, chuckling.

"You think so," said De Guiche, simply.

"Think so, indeed! do you suppose that he was sent to London for no other purpose than to go there and return again immediately. No, no; he was sent to London to remain there."

"Ah! De Wardes," said De Guiche, grasping De Wardes' hand, "that is a very serious suspicion concerning Bragelonne, which completely confirms what he wrote to me from Boulogne."

De Wardes resumed his former coldness of manner: his love of raillery had led him too far, and by his own imprudence, he had laid himself open to attack.

"Well, tell me, what did he write to you about?" he inquired.

"He told me that you had artfully insinuated some injurious remarks against La Vallière, and that you had seemed to laugh at his great confidence in that young girl."

"Well, it is perfectly true I did so," said De Wardes, "and I was quite ready, at the time, to hear from the Vicomte de Bragelonne that which every man expects from another whenever anything may have been said to displease him. In the same way, for instance, if I were seeking a quarrel with you, I should tell you that Madame after having shown the greatest preference for the Duke of Buckingham, is at this moment supposed to have sent the handsome duke away for your benefit."

"Oh! that would not wound me in the slightest degree, my dear De Wardes," said De Guiche, smiling, notwithstanding the shiver that ran through his whole frame. "Why, such a favor would be too great a happiness."

"I admit that, but if I absolutely wished to quarrel with you, I should try and invent a falsehood, perhaps, and speak to you about a certain arbor, where you and that illustrious princess were together—I should speak also of certain genuflections, of certain kissings of the hand; and you who are so secret on all occasions, so hasty, so punctilious——"

"Well," said De Guiche, interrupting him, with a smile upon his lips, although he almost felt as if he were going to die; "I swear I should not care for that, nor should I in any way contradict you; for you must know, my dear marquis, that for all matters which concern myself I am a block of ice; but it is a very different thing when an absent friend is concerned, a friend who, on leaving, confided his interests to my safe-keeping; for such a friend, De Wardes, believe me I am like fire itself."

"I understand you, Monsieur De Guiche. In spite of what you say, there cannot be any question between us just now, either of Bragelonne or of this insignificant girl, whose name is La Vallière."

At this moment some of the younger courtiers were crossing the apartment, and having already heard the few words which had just been pronounced, were able also to hear those which were about to follow. De Wardes observed this, and continued aloud;—"Oh! if La Vallière were a coquette like Madame, whose innocent flirtations, I am sure, were, first of all, the cause of the Duke of Buckingham being sent back to England, and afterwards were the reason of your being sent into exile; for you will not deny, I suppose, that Madame's pretty ways really had a certain influence over you?"

The courtiers drew nearer to the speakers, Saint-Aignan at their head, and then Manicamp.

"But, my dear fellow, whose fault was that?" said De Guiche, laughing. "I am a vain, conceited fellow, I know, and everybody else knows it too. I took seriously that which was only intended as a jest, and got myself exiled for my pains. But I saw my error. I overcame my vanity, and I obtained my recall, by making the *amende honorable*, and by promising myself to overcome this defect; and the consequence is, that I am so thoroughly cured, that I now laugh at the very thing which, three or four days ago, would have almost broken my heart. But Raoul is in love, and is loved in return; he cannot laugh at the reports which disturb his happiness—reports which you seem to have undertaken to interpret, when you know, marquis, as I do, as these gentlemen do, as every one does in fact, that all such reports are pure calumny."

"Calumny!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at seeing himself caught in the snare by De Guiche's coolness of temper.

"Certainly—calumny. Look at this letter from him, in which he tells me you have spoken ill of Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and where he asks me, if what you reported about this young girl is true or not. Do you wish me to appeal to these gentlemen, De Wardes, to decide?" And with admirable coolness, De Guiche read aloud the paragraph of the letter which referred to La Vallière. "And now," continued De Guiche, "there is no doubt in the world, as far as I am concerned, that you wished to disturb Bragelonne's peace of mind, and that your remarks were maliciously intended."

De Wardes looked round him, to see if he could find support from any one; but, at the idea, that De Wardes had insulted, either directly or indirectly, the idol of the

day, every one shook his head; and De Wardes saw that there was no one present who would have refused to say he was in the wrong.

"Messieurs," said De Guiche, intuitively divining the general feeling, "my discussion with Monsieur de Wardes refers to a subject so delicate in its nature, that it is most important no one should hear more than you have already heard. Close the doors, then, I beg you, and let us finish our conversation in the manner which becomes two gentlemen, one of whom has given the other the lie."

"Messieurs, messieurs!" exclaimed those who were present.

"Is it your opinion, then, that I was wrong in defending Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said De Guiche. "In that case, I pass judgment upon myself, and am ready to withdraw the offensive words I may have used to Monsieur de Wardes."

"The deuce! certainly not!" said Saint-Aignan. "Mademoiselle de la Vallière is an angel."

"Virtue and purity itself," said Manicamp.

"You see, Monsieur de Wardes," said De Guiche, "I am not the only one who undertakes the defense of that poor girl. I entreat you, therefore, messieurs, a second time, to leave us. You see, it is impossible we could be more calm and composed than we are."

It was the very thing the courtiers wished; some went out at one door, and the rest at the other, and the two young men were left alone.

"Well played," said De Wardes, to the comte.

"Was it not?" replied the latter.

"How can it be wondered at, my dear fellow; I have got quite rusty in the country, while the command you have acquired over yourself, comte, confounds me; a man always gains something in women's society; so, pray accept my congratulations."

"I do accept them."

"And I will make Madame a present of them."

"And now, my dear Monsieur de Wardes, let us speak as loud as you please."

"Do not defy me."

"I do defy you, for you are known to be an evil-minded man; if you do that, you will be looked upon as a coward, too; and Monsieur would have you hanged, this evening, at his window-casement. Speak, my dear De Wardes, speak."

"I have fought already."

"But not quite enough, yet."

"I see, you would not be sorry to fight with me while my wounds are still open."

"No; better still."

"The deuce! you are unfortunate in the moment you have chosen; a duel, after the one I have just fought, would hardly suit me; I have lost too much blood at Boulogne; at the slightest effort my wounds would open again, and you would really have too good a bargain."

"True," said De Guiche; "and yet, on your arrival here, your looks and your arms showed there was nothing the matter with you."

"Yes, my arms are all right, but my legs are weak; and then, I have not had a foil in my hand since that devil of a duel; and you, I am sure, have been fencing every day, in order to carry your little conspiracy against me to a successful issue."

"Upon my honor, monsieur," replied De Guiche, "it is six months since I last practiced."

"No, comte, after due reflection, I will not fight, at least, with you. I will await Bragelonne's return, since you say it is Bragelonne who finds fault with me."

"Oh no, indeed! You shall not wait until Bragelonne's return," exclaimed the comte, losing all command over himself, "for you have said that Bragelonne might, pos-

sibly, be some time before he returns; and, in the meanwhile, your wicked insinuations would have had their effect."

"Yet, I shall have my excuse. So take care."

"I will give you a week to finish your recovery."

"That is better. We will wait a week."

"Yes, yes, I understand; a week will give time to my adversary to make his escape. No, no; I will not give you one day, even."

"You are mad, monsieur," said De Wardes, retreating a step.

"And you are a coward, if you do not fight willingly. Nay, what is more, I will denounce you to the king, as having refused to fight, after having insulted La Vallière."

"Ah!" said De Wardes, "you are dangerously treacherous, though you pass for a man of honor."

"There is nothing more dangerous than the treachery, as you term it, of the man whose conduct is always loyal and upright."

"Restore me the use of my legs, then, or get yourself bled, till you are as white as I am, so as to equalize our chances."

"No, no; I have something better than that to propose."

"What is it?"

"We will fight on horseback, and will exchange three pistol-shots each. You are a first rate marksman. I have seen you bring down swallows with single balls, and at full gallop. Do not deny it, for I have seen you myself."

"I believe you are right," said De Wardes; "and as that is the case, it is not unlikely I might kill you."

"You would be rendering me a very great service, if you did."

"I will do my best."

"Is it agreed? Give me your hand upon it."

"There it is: but on one condition, however."

"Name it."

"That not a word shall be said about it to the king."

"Not a word, I swear."

"I will go and get my horse, then."

"And I, mine."

"Where shall we meet?"

"In the plain ; I know an admirable place."

"Shall we go together?"

"Why not?"

And both of them, on their way to the stables, passed beneath Madame's windows, which were faintly lighted ; a shadow could be seen behind the lace curtains. "There is a woman," said De Wardes, smiling, "who does not suspect that we are going to fight—to die, perhaps, on her account."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE COMBAT.

DE WARDES and De Guiche selected their horses, and saddled them with their own hands, with holster saddles. De Guiche, having two pairs of pistols, went to his apartments to get them ; and after having loaded them, gave the choice to De Wardes, who selected the pair he had made use of twenty times before—the same, indeed, with which De Guiche had seen him kill swallows flying. "You will not be surprised," he said, "if I take every precaution. You know the weapons well, and, consequently, I am only making the chances equal."

"Your remark was quite useless," replied De Guiche, "and you have done no more than you are entitled to do."

"Now," said De Wardes, "I beg you to have the good-

ness to help me to mount; for I still experience a little difficulty in doing so."

"In that case, we had better settle the matter on foot."

"No; once in the saddle, I shall be all right."

"Very good, then; we will not speak of it again," said De Guiche, as he assisted De Wardes to mount his horse.

"And now," continued the young man, "in our eagerness to murder one another, we have neglected one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"That it is quite dark, and we shall almost be obliged to grope about, in order to kill."

"Oh!" said De Guiche, "you are as anxious as I am that everything should be done in proper order."

"Yes; but I do not wish people to say that you have assassinated me, any more than, supposing I were to kill you, I should myself like to be accused of such a crime."

"Did any one make a similar remark about your duel with the Duke of Buckingham?" said De Guiche, "it took place precisely under the same conditions as ours."

"Very true; but there was still light enough to see by; and we were up to our middles almost, in the water; besides, there were a good number of spectators on shore, looking at us."

De Guiche reflected for a moment; and the thought which had already presented itself to him became more confirmed—that De Wardes wished to have witnesses present, in order to bring back the conversation about Madame, and to give a new turn to the combat. He avoided saying a word in reply, therefore; and, as De Wardes once more looked at him interrogatively, he replied, by a movement of the head, that it would be best to let things remain as they were. The two adversaries consequently set off, and left the château by the same gate,

close to which we may remember to have seen Montalais and Malicorne together. The night, as if to counteract the extreme heat of the day, had gathered the clouds together in masses which were moving slowly along from the west to the east. The vault above, without a clear spot anywhere visible, seemed to hang heavily over the earth, and soon began, by the force of the wind, to split into streamers, like a huge sheet torn to shreds. Large and warm drops of rain began to fall heavily, and gathered the dust into globules, which rolled along the ground. At the same time, the hedges, which seemed conscious of the approaching storm, the thirsty plants, the drooping branches of the trees, exhaled a thousand aromatic odors, which revived in the mind tender recollections, thoughts of youth, endless life, happiness, and love. "How fresh the earth smells," said De Wardes; "it is a piece of coquetry to draw us to her."

"By the by," replied De Guiche, "several ideas have just occurred to me; and I wish to have your opinion upon them."

"Relative to——?"

"Relative to our engagement."

"It is quite time, in fact, that we should begin to arrange matters."

"Is it to be an ordinary combat, and conducted according to established custom?"

"Let me first know what your established custom is."

"That we dismount in any particular open space that may suit us, fasten our horses to the nearest object, meet, each without our pistols in our hands, and afterwards retire for a hundred and fifty paces, in order to advance on each other."

"Very good; that is precisely the way in which I killed poor Follivent, three weeks ago, at Saint-Denis."

"I beg your pardon, but you forget one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"That in your duel with Follivent you advanced towards each other on foot, your swords between your teeth, and your pistols in your hands."

"True."

"While now, on the contrary, as I cannot walk, you yourself admit that we shall have to mount our horses again, and charge; and the first who wishes to fire will do so."

"That is the best course, no doubt; but it is quite dark; we must make allowance for more missed shots than would be the case in the daytime."

"Very well; each will fire three times; the pair of pistols already loaded, and one reload."

"Excellent! Where shall our engagement take place?"

"Have you any preference?"

"No."

"You see that small wood which lies before us."

"The wood which is called Rochin?"

"Exactly."

"You know it?"

"Perfectly."

"You know that there is an open glade in the center?"

"Yes."

"Well this glade is admirably adapted for such a purpose, with a variety of roads, by-places, paths, ditches, windings, and avenues. We could not find a better spot."

"I am perfectly satisfied, if you are so. We are at our destination, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes. Look at the beautiful open space in the center. The faint light which the stars afford seems concentrated in this spot; the woods which surround it seem, with their barriers, to form its natural limits."

"Very good. Do as you say."

"Let us first settle the conditions."

"These are mine; if you have any objection to make you will state it."

"I am listening."

"If the horse be killed, its rider will be obliged to fight on foot."

"That is a matter of course, since we have no change of horses here."

"But that does not oblige his adversary to dismount."

"His adversary will, in fact, be free to act as he likes."

"The adversaries, having once met in close contact, cannot quit each other under any circumstances, and may consequently, fire muzzle to muzzle."

"Agreed."

"Three shots and no more will do, I suppose?"

"Quite sufficient, I think. Here are powder and balls for your pistols; measure out three charges, take three balls; I will do the same; then we will throw the rest of the powder and the balls away."

"And we will solemnly swear," said De Wardes, "that we have neither balls nor powder about us?"

"Agreed; and I swear it," said De Guiche, holding his hand towards heaven, a gesture which De Wardes imitated.

"And now, my dear comte," said De Wardes, "allow me to tell you that I am in no way your dupe. You already are, or soon will be, the accepted lover of Madame. I have detected your secret, and you are afraid I shall tell others of it. You wish to kill me, to insure my silence; that is very clear; and in your place, I should do the same." De Guiche hung down his head. "Only," continued De Wardes, triumphantly, "was it really worth while, tell me, to throw this affair of Bragelonne's on my shoulders? But, take care, my dear fellow; in bringing the wild boar to bay, you enrage him to madness; in running down the fox, you endow him with the ferocity of

the jaguar. The consequence is, that brought to bay by you, I shall defend myself to the very last."

"You will be quite right to do so."

"Yes; but take care; I shall work more harm than you think. In the first place, as a beginning, you will readily suppose that I have not been absurd enough to lock up my secret, or your secret rather, in my own breast. There is a friend of mine, who resembles me in every way, a man whom you know very well, who shares my secret with me; so, pray understand, that if you kill me, my death will not have been of much service to you; whilst, on the contrary, if I kill you—and everything is possible, you know—you understand?" De Guiche shuddered. "If I kill you," continued De Wardes, "you will have secured two mortal enemies to Madame, who will do their very utmost to ruin her."

"Oh! monsieur," exclaimed De Guiche, furiously, "do not reckon upon my death so easily. Of the two enemies you speak of, I trust most heartily to dispose of one immediately, and the other at the earliest opportunity."

The only reply De Wardes made was a burst of laughter, so diabolical in its sound, that a superstitious man would have been terrified. But De Guiche was not so impressionable as that. "I think," he said, "that everything is now settled, Monsieur de Wardes; so have the goodness to take your place first, unless you would prefer me to do so."

"By no means," said De Wardes. I shall be delighted to save you the slightest trouble." And spurring his horse to a gallop, he crossed the wide open space, and took his stand at that point of the circumference of the cross road immediately opposite to where De Guiche was stationed. De Guiche remained motionless. At this distance of a hundred paces, the two adversaries were absolutely invisible to each other, being completely concealed by the thick

shade of elms and chestnuts. A minute elapsed amidst the profoundest silence. At the end of the minute, each of them, in the deep shade in which he was concealed, heard the double click of the trigger, as they put the pistols on full cock. De Guiche, adopting the usual tactics, put his horse to a gallop, persuaded that he should render his safety doubly sure by the movement, as well as by the speed of the animal. He directed his course in a straight line towards the point where, in his opinion, De Wardes would be stationed ; and he expected to meet De Wardes about half-way ; but in this he was mistaken. He continued his course, presuming that his adversary was impatiently awaiting his approach. When, however, he had gone about two-thirds of the distance, he beheld the trees suddenly illuminated and a ball flew by, cutting the plume of his hat in two. Nearly at the same moment, and as if the flash of the first shot had served to indicate the direction of the other, a second report was heard, and a second ball passed through the head of De Guiche's horse, a little below the ear. The animal fell. These two reports proceeding from the very opposite direction to that in which he expected to find De Wardes, surprised him a great deal ; but as he was a man of amazing self-possession, he prepared himself for his horse falling, but not so completely, however, that the toe of his boot escaped being caught under the animal as it fell. Very fortunately the horse in its dying agonies moved so as to enable him to release the leg which was less entangled than the other. De Guiche rose, felt himself all over, and found that he was not wounded. At the very moment he had felt the horse tottering under him, he placed his pistols in the holsters, afraid that the force of the fall might explode one at least, if not both of them, by which he would have been disarmed, and left utterly without defense. Once on his feet, he took the pistols out of the holsters, and ad-

vanced towards the spot, where, by the light of the flash, he had seen De Wardes appear. De Guiche had, at the first shot, accounted for the maneuver, than which nothing could have been simpler. Instead of advancing to meet De Guiche, or remaining in his place to await his approach, De Wardes had, for about fifteen paces, followed the circle of the shadow which hid him from his adversary's observation, and at the very moment when the latter presented his flank in his career, he had fired from the place where he stood, carefully taking aim, and assisted instead of being inconvenienced by the horse's gallop. It has been seen that, notwithstanding the darkness, the first ball passed hardly more than an inch above De Guiche's head. De Wardes had so confidently relied upon his aim, that he thought he had seen De Guiche fall; his astonishment was extreme when he saw he still remained erect in his saddle. He hastened to fire his second shot, but his hand trembled, and he killed the horse instead. It would be a most fortunate chance for him if De Guiche were to remain held fast under the animal. Before he could have freed himself, De Wardes would have loaded his pistol and had De Guiche at his mercy. But De Guiche, on the contrary, was up, and had three shots to fire. De Guiche immediately understood the position of affairs. It would be necessary to exceed De Wardes in rapidity of execution. He advanced, therefore, so as to reach him before he should have had time to reload his pistol. De Wardes saw him approaching like a tempest. The ball was rather tight, and offered some resistance to the ramrod. To load carelessly would be simply to lose his last chance; to take the proper care in loading meant fatal loss of time, or rather, throwing away his life. He made his horse bound on one side. De Guiche turned round also, and, at the moment the horse was quiet again, fired, and the ball carried off De Wardes' hat from his head.

De Wardes now knew that he had a moment's time at his own disposal; he availed himself of it in order to finish loading his pistol. De Guiche, noticing that his adversary did not fall, threw the pistol he had just discharged aside, and walked straight towards De Wardes, elevating the second pistol as he did so. He had hardly proceeded more than two or three paces, when De Wardes took aim at him as he was walking, and fired. An exclamation of anger was De Guiche's answer; the comte's arm contracted and dropped motionless by his side, and the pistol fell from his grasp. But De Wardes observed the comte stoop down, pick up the pistol with his left hand, and again advance towards him. His anxiety was excessive. "I am lost," murmured De Wardes, "he is not mortally wounded." At the very moment, however, De Guiche was about to raise his pistol against De Wardes, the head, shoulders, and limbs of the comte seemed to collapse. He heaved a deep-drawn sigh, tottered, and fell at the feet of De Wardes' horse.

"That is all right," said De Wardes, and gathering up the reins, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides. The horse cleared the comte's motionless body, and bore De Wardes rapidly back to the château. When he arrived there, he remained a quarter of an hour deliberating within himself as to the proper course to be adopted. In his impatience to leave the field of battle, he had omitted to ascertain whether De Guiche were dead or not. A double hypothesis presented itself to De Wardes' agitated mind; either De Guiche was killed, or De Guiche was wounded only. If he were killed, why should he leave his body in that manner to the tender mercies of the wolves; it was a perfectly useless piece of cruelty, for if De Guiche were dead, he certainly could not breathe a syllable of what had passed; if he were not killed, why should he, De Wardes, in leaving him there uncared for, allow himself to be re-

garded as a savage, incapable of one generous feeling? This last consideration determined his line of conduct.

De Wardes immediately instituted inquiries after Manicamp. He was told that Manicamp had been looking after De Guiche, and, not knowing where to find him, had retired to bed. De Wardes went and awoke the sleeper, without any delay, and related the whole affair to him, which Manicamp listened to in perfect silence, but with an expression of momentarily increasing energy, of which his face could hardly have been supposed capable. It was only when De Wardes had finished, that Manicamp uttered the words, "Let us go."

As they proceeded, Manicamp became more and more excited, and in proportion as De Wardes related the details of the affair to him, his countenance assumed every moment a darker expression. "And so," he said, when De Wardes had finished, "you think he is dead?"

"Alas, I do."

"And you fought in that manner, without witnesses?"

"He insisted upon it."

"It is very singular."

"What do you mean by saying it is singular?"

"That it is so very unlike Monsieur de Guiche's disposition."

"You do not doubt my word, I suppose?"

"Hum! hum!"

"You do doubt it, then?"

"A little. But I shall doubt it more than ever, I warn you, if I find the poor fellow is really dead."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"Monsieur de Wardes!"

"It seems you intend to insult me."

"Just as you please. The fact is, I never did like people who come and say, 'I have killed such and such a gentle-

man in a corner; it is a great pity, but I killed him in a perfectly honorable manner.' It has an ugly appearance, M. de Wardes."

"Silence! we have arrived."

In fact, the glade could now be seen, and in the open space lay the motionless body of the dead horse. To the right of the horse, upon the dark grass, with his face against the ground, the poor comte lay, bathed in his blood. He had remained in the same spot, and did not even seem to have made the slightest movement. Manicamp threw himself on his knees, lifted the comte in his arms, and found him quite cold, and steeped in blood. He let him gently fall again. Then, stretching out his hand and feeling all over the ground close to where the comte lay, he sought until he found De Guiche's pistol.

"By Heaven!" he said, rising to his feet, pale as death and with the pistol in his hand, "you are not mistaken, he is quite dead."

"Dead!" repeated De Wardes.

"Yes; and his pistol is still loaded," added Manicamp, looking into the pan.

"But I told you that I took aim as he was walking towards me, and fired at him at the very moment he was going to fire at me."

"Are you quite sure that you fought with him, Monsieur de Wardes? I confess that I am very much afraid it has been a foul assassination. Nay, nay, no exclamations! You have had your three shots, and his pistol is still loaded. You have killed his horse, and he, De Guiche, one of the best marksmen in France, has not touched even either your horse or yourself. Well, Monsieur de Wardes, you have been very unlucky in bringing me here; all the blood in my body seems to have mounted to my head; and I verily believe that since so good an opportunity presents itself, I shall blow out your

brains on the spot. So Monsieur de Wardes, recommend yourself to Heaven."

"Monsieur Manicamp, you cannot think of such a thing!"

"On the contrary, I am thinking of it very strongly."

"Would you assassinate me?"

"Without the slightest remorse, at least for the present."

"Are you a gentleman?"

"I have given a great many proofs of it."

"Let me defend my life, then, at least."

"Very likely; in order, I suppose, that you may do to me what you have done to poor De Guiche."

And Manicamp slowly raised his pistol to the height of De Wardes' breast, and with arm stretched out, and a fixed, determined look on his face, took a careful aim.

De Wardes did not attempt a flight; he was completely terrified. In the midst, however, of this horrible silence, which lasted about a second, but which seemed an age to De Wardes, a faint sigh was heard.

"Oh," exclaimed De Wardes, "he still lives! Help, De Guiche, I am about to be assassinated!"

Manicamp fell back a step or two, and the two young men saw the comte raise himself slowly and painfully upon one hand. Manicamp threw the pistol away a dozen paces, and ran to his friend, uttering a cry of delight. De Wardes wiped his forehead, which was covered with a cold perspiration.

"It was just in time," he murmured.

"Where are you hurt?" inquired Manicamp of De Guiche, "and whereabouts are you wounded?"

De Guiche showed him his mutilated hand and his chest covered with blood.

"Comte," exclaimed De Wardes, "I am accused of

having assassinated you ; speak, I implore you, and say that I fought loyally."

"Perfectly so," said the wounded man ; "Monsieur De Wardes fought quite loyally, and whoever says the contrary will make an enemy of me."

"Then, sir," said Manicamp, "assist me, in the first place, to carry this gentleman home, and I will afterwards give you every satisfaction you please ; or, if you are in a hurry, we can do better still ; let us stanch the blood from the comte's wounds here, with your pocket-handkerchief and mine, and then, as there are two shots left, we can have them between us."

"Thank you," said De Wardes. "Twice already, in one hour, I have seen death too close at hand to be agreeable ; I don't like his look at all, and I prefer your apologies."

Manicamp burst out laughing, and Guiche too, in spite of his sufferings. The two young men wished to carry him, but he declared he felt quite strong enough to walk alone. The ball had broken his ring-finger and his little finger, and then had glanced along his side, but without penetrating deeply into his chest. It was the pain rather than the seriousness of the wound, therefore, which had overcome De Guiche. Manicamp passed his arm under one of the count's shoulders, and De Wardes did the same with the other, and in this way they brought him back to Fontainebleau, to the house of the same doctor who had been present at the death of the Franciscan, Aramis's predecessor.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE KING'S SUPPER.

THE king while these matters were being arranged was sitting at the supper-table, and the not very large number of guests invited for that day had taken their seats too, after the usual gesture intimating the royal permission. At this period of Louis XIV.'s reign, although etiquette was not governed by the strict regulations subsequently adopted, the French court had entirely thrown aside the traditions of good fellowship and patriarchal affability existing in the time of Henry IV., which the suspicious mind of Louis XIII. had gradually replaced with pompous state and ceremony.

The king, therefore, was seated alone at a small separate table, which, like the desk of a president, overlooked the adjoining tables. Although we say a small table, we must not omit to add that this small table was the largest one there. Moreover, it was the one on which were placed the greatest number and quantity of dishes, consisting of fish, game, meat, fruit, vegetables, and preserves. The king was young and full of vigor and energy, very fond of hunting, addicted to all violent exercises of the body, possessing, besides, like all the members of the Bourbon family, a rapid digestion and an appetite speedily renewed. Louis XIV. was a formidable table-companion; he delighted in criticising his cooks; but when he honored them by praise and commendation, the honor was overwhelming. The king began by eating several kinds of soup, either mixed together or taken separately. He intermixed, or rather separated, each of the soups by

a glass of old wine. He ate quickly and somewhat greedily. Porthos, who from the beginning had, out of respect, been waiting for a jog of D'Artagnan's arm, seeing the king make such rapid progress, turned to the musketeer and said in a low tone—

"It seems as if one might go on now; his majesty is very encouraging, from the example he sets. Look."

"The king eats," said D'Artagnan, "but he talks at the same time; try and manage matters in such manner, that, if he should happen to address a remark to you, he will not find you with your mouth full—which would be very disrespectful."

"The best way in that case," said Porthos, "is to eat no supper at all; and yet I am very hungry, I admit, and everything looks and smells most invitingly, as if appealing to all my senses at once."

"Don't think of not eating, for a moment," said D'Artagnan; "that would put his majesty out terribly. The king has a saying, 'that he who works well, eats well,' and he does not like people to eat indifferently at his table."

"How can I avoid having my mouth full if I eat?" said Porthos.

"All you have to do," replied the captain of the musketeers, "is simply to swallow what you have in it, whenever the king does you the honor to address a remark to you."

"Very good," said Porthos; and from that moment he began to eat with a certain well-bred enthusiasm.

The king occasionally looked at the different persons who were at table with him, and, *en connoisseur*, could appreciate the different dispositions of his guests.

"Monsieur du Vallon!" he said.

Porthos was enjoying a *salmi de lièvre*, and swallowed half of the back. His name, pronounced in such a manner,

made him start, and by a vigorous effort of his gullet he absorbed the whole mouthful.

"Sire," replied Porthos, in a stifled voice, but sufficiently intelligible, nevertheless.

"Let those *filets d'agneau* be handed to Monsieur du Vallon," said the king; "do you like brown meats, M. du Vallon?"

"Sire, I like everything," replied Porthos.

D'Artagnan whispered: "Everything your majesty sends me."

Porthos repeated: "Everything your majesty sends me," an observation which the king apparently received with great satisfaction.

"People eat well who work well," replied the king, delighted to have *en tête-à-tête* a guest who could eat as Porthos did. Porthos received the dish of lamb, and put a portion of it on his plate.

"Well?" said the king.

"Exquisite," said Porthos, calmly.

"Have you as good mutton in your part of the country, Monsieur du Vallon!" continued the king.

"Sire, I believe, that from my own province, as everywhere else, the best of everything is sent to Paris for your majesty's use; but, on the other hand, I do not eat lamb in the same way your majesty does."

"Ah! ah! and how do you eat it?"

"Generally, I have a lamb dressed whole."

"Whole?"

"Yes, sire."

"In what manner, Monsieur du Vallon?"

"In this, sire: my cook, who is a German, first stuffs the lamb in question with small sausages he procures from Strasburg, force-meat balls from Troyes, and larks from Pithiviers; by some means or other, which I am not acquainted with, he bones the lamb as he would do a fowl,

leaving the skin on however, which forms a brown crust all over the animal; when it is cut in beautiful slices, in the same way as an enormous sausage, a rose-colored gravy pours forth, which is as agreeable to the eye as it is exquisite to the palate." And Porthos finished by smacking his lips.

The king opened his eyes with delight, and, while cutting some of the *faisan en daube*, which was being handed to him, he said:

"That is a dish I should very much like to taste, Monsieur du Vallon. Is it possible! a whole lamb!"

"Absolutely an entire lamb, sire."

"Pass those pheasants to M. du Vallon; I perceive he is an amateur."

The order was immediately obeyed. Then, continuing the conversation, he said: "And you do not find the lamb too fat?"

"No, sire, the fat falls down at the same time as the gravy does, and swims on the surface; then the servant who carves removes the fat with a spoon, which I have had expressly made for that purpose."

"Where do you reside?" inquired the king.

"At Pierrefonds, sire."

"At Pierrefonds; where is that, M. du Vallon—near Belle-Isle?"

"Oh no sire! Pierrefonds is in the Soissonnais."

"I thought you alluded to the lamb on account of the salt marshes."

"No, sire, I have marshes which are not salt, it is true, but which are not the less valuable on that account."

The king had now arrived at the *entremets*, but without losing sight of Porthos, who continued to play his part in the best manner.

"You have an excellent appetite, M. du Vallon, said the king, "and you make an admirable guest at table."

"Ah! sire, if your majesty were ever to pay a visit to Pierrefonds, we would both of us eat our lamb together; for your appetite is not an indifferent one by any means."

D'Artagnan gave Porthos a severe kick under the table, which made Porthos color up.

"At your majesty's present happy age," said Porthos, in order to repair the mistake he had made, "I was in the musketeers, and nothing could ever satisfy me then. Your majesty has an excellent appetite, as I have already had the honor of mentioning, but you select what you eat with quite too much refinement to be called for one moment a great eater."

The king seemed charmed at his guest's politeness.

"Will you try some of these creams?" he said to Porthos.

"Sire, your majesty treats me with far too much kindness to prevent me speaking the whole truth."

"Pray do so, M. du Vallon."

"Well, sire, with regard to sweet dishes I only recognize pastry, and even that should be rather solid; all these frothy substances swell the stomach, and occupy a space which seems to me to be too precious to be so badly tenanted."

"Ah! gentlemen," said the king, indicating Porthos by a gesture, "here is indeed a model of gastronomy. It was in such a manner that our fathers, who so well knew what good living was, used to *eat*, while we," added his majesty, "do nothing but tantalize with our stomachs." And as he spoke, he took the breast of a chicken with ham, while Porthos attacked a dish of partridges and quails. The cup-bearer filled his majesty's glass. "Give M. du Vallon some of my wine," said the king. This was one of the greatest honors of the royal table. D'Artagnan pressed his friend's knee. "If you could only manage to swallow the half of that boar's head I see yonder," said he to Porthos,

I shall believe you will be a duke and peer within the next twelvemonth."

"Presently," said Porthos, phlegmatically; "I shall come to that by and by."

In fact it was not long before it came to the boar's turn, for the king seemed to take a pleasure in urging on his guest; he did not pass any of the dishes to Porthos until he had tasted them himself, and he accordingly took some of the boar's head. Porthos showed that he could keep pace with his sovereign; and, instead of eating the half, as D'Artagnan had told him, he ate three-fourths of it. "It is impossible," said the king in an undertone, "that a gentleman who eats so good a supper every day, and who has such beautiful teeth, can be otherwise than the most straightforward, upright man in my kingdom."

"Do you hear?" said D'Artagnan in his friend's ear.

"Yes; I think I am rather in favor," said Porthos, balancing himself on his chair.

"Oh! you are in luck's way."

The king and Porthos continued to eat in the same manner, to the great satisfaction of the other guests, some of whom, from emulation, had attempted to follow them, but were obliged to give up half-way. The king soon began to get flushed, and the reaction of the blood to his face announced that the moment of repletion had arrived. It was then that Louis XIV., instead of becoming gay and cheerful, as most good livers generally do, became dull, melancholy, and taciturn. Porthos, on the contrary, was lively and communicative. D'Artagnan's foot had more than once to remind him of this peculiarity of the king. The dessert now made its appearance. The king had ceased to think anything further of Porthos; he turned his eyes anxiously towards the entrance-door, and he was heard occasionally to inquire how it happened that Monsieur de Saint-Aignan was so long in arriving. At last, at the

moment when his majesty was finishing a pot of preserved plums with a deep sigh, Saint-Aignan appeared. The king's eyes, which had become somewhat dull, immediately began to sparkle. The comte advanced towards the king's table, and Louis rose at his approach. Everybody got up at the same time, including Porthos, who was just finishing an almond-cake capable of making the jaws of a crocodile stick together. The supper was over.

CHAPTER XLV.

AFTER SUPPER.

THE king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining apartment. "What has detained you, comte?" said the king.

"I was bringing the answer, sire," replied the comte.

"She has taken a long time to reply to what I wrote her."

"Sire, your majesty deigned to write in verse, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière wished to repay your majesty in the same coin; that is to say in gold."

"Verses! Saint-Aignan," exclaimed the king in ecstasy. "Give them to me at once." And Louis broke the seal of a little letter, inclosing the verses which history has preserved entire for us, and which are more meritorious in intention than in execution. Such as they were, however, the king was enchanted with them, and exhibited his satisfaction by unequivocal transports of delight; but the universal silence which reigned in the rooms warned Louis, so sensitively particular with regard to good breeding, that his delight might give rise to various interpretations. He turned aside and put the note in his pocket, and then advancing a few steps, which brought him again to the

threshold of the door close to his guests, he said, "M. du Vallon I have seen you to-day with the greatest pleasure, and my pleasure will be equally great to see you again." Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes would have done, and retired from the room with his face towards the king. M. d'Artagnan continued the king, you will await my orders in the gallery; I am obliged to you for having made me acquainted with M. du Vallon. Gentlemen," addressing himself to the other guests, "I return to Paris to-morrow on account of the departure of the Spanish and Dutch ambassadors. Until to-morrow then."

The apartment was immediately cleared of the guests. The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, made him read La Vallière's verses over again, and said, "What do you think of them?"

"Charming, sire."

"They charm me, in fact, and if they were known——"

"Oh! the professional poets would be jealous of them; but it is not at all likely they will know anything about them."

"Did you give her mine?"

"Oh! sire, she positively devoured them."

"They were very weak, I am afraid."

"That is not what Mademoiselle de la Vallière said of them."

"Do you think she was pleased with them?"

"I am sure of it, sire."

"I must answer, then."

"Oh! sire, immediately after supper? Your majesty will fatigue yourself."

"You are quite right; study after eating is notoriously injurious."

"The labor of a poet especially so; and, besides, there is great excitement prevailing at Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"What do you mean?"

"With her as with all the ladies of the court."

"Why?"

"On account of poor De Guiche's accident."

"Has anything serious happened to De Guiche, then?"

"Yes, sir, he has one hand nearly destroyed, a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying."

"Good heavens! who told you that?"

"Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumor soon reached us all."

"Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?"

"Ah! that is the very question,—how did it happen?"

"You say that in a very singular manner, Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he say himself?"

"He says nothing, sire; but others do."

"What others?"

"Those who brought him back, sire."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends."

"As everybody is indeed," said the king.

"Oh! no!" returned Saint-Aignan, "you are mistaken, sire; every one is not precisely a friend of M. de Guiche."

"How do you know that?"

"Does your majesty require me to explain myself?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, sire, I believe I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper was served."

"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent

and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."

"In that case, Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty commanded me to speak, and I spoke accordingly."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded?"

"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."

"This evening?"

"Yes, sire."

"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast. Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, Saint-Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, I assure you."

"Then, explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"

"Very likely, sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."

"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol, I should think."

"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed and that the horse is still to be found in the wide open glade in the forest."

"His horse?—Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt?—Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a syllable of what you have been telling me. Where did the affair happen?"

"At the Rond-point, in that part of the forest called the Bois-Rochin."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan." Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave

this place by the little door of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will proceed to the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin. Do you know the spot?"

"Yes, sire. I have fought there twice."

"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.

"Under the edicts, sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual impassibility.

"That is very different, monsieur. You will, therefore, go there, and will examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."

"Very good, sire."

"As a matter of course it is your own opinion I require, and not that of any one else."

"You shall have it in an hour's time, sir."

"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever it may be."

"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! that is a matter of course," said the king, laughing at the liberty, which he tolerated in no one but his captain of musketeers. D'Artagnan left by the little staircase.

"Now, let my physician be sent for," said Louis. Ten minutes afterwards the king's physician arrived, quite out of breath.

"You will go, monsieur," said the king to him, "and accompany M. de Saint-Aignan wherever he may take you; you will render me an account of the state of the person you may see in the house you will be taken to." The physician obeyed without a remark, as at that time

people began to obey Louis XIV., and left the room preceding Saint-Aignan.

"Do you, Saint-Aignan, send Manicamp to me, before the physician can possibly have spoken to him." And Saint-Aignan left in his turn.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SHOWING IN WHAT WAY D'ARTAGNAN DISCHARGED THE MISSION WITH WHICH THE KING HAD INTRUSTED HIM.

WHILE the king was engaged in making these last mentioned arrangements in order to ascertain the truth, D'Artagnan, without losing a second, ran to the stable, took down the lantern, saddled his horse himself, and proceeded towards the place his majesty had indicated. According to the promise he had made, he had not accosted any one; and, as we have observed, he had carried his scruples so far as to do without the assistance of the stable-helpers altogether. D'Artagnan was one of those who in moments of difficulty pride themselves on increasing their own value. By dint of hard galloping, he in less than five minutes reached the wood, fastened his horse to the first tree he came to, and penetrated to the broad open space on foot. He then began to inspect most carefully, on foot and with his lantern in his hand, the whole surface of the Rond-point, went forward, turned back again, measured, examined, and after half an hour's minute inspection, he returned silently to where he had left his horse, and pursued his way in deep reflection and at a foot-pace to Fontainebleau. Louis was waiting in his cabinet; he was alone, and with a pencil was scribbling on paper certain lines which D'Artagnan at the first glance recognized as unequal and very much touched up.

The conclusion he arrived at was, that they must be verses. The king raised his head and perceived D'Artagnan. "Well, monsieur," he said, "do you bring me any news?"

"Yes, sire."

"What have you seen?"

"As far as probability goes, sire," D'Artagnan began to reply.

"It was certainty I requested of you."

"I will approach it as near as I possibly can. The weather was very well adapted for investigations of the character I have just made; it has been raining this evening, and the roads were wet and muddy——"

"Well, the result, M d'Artagnan?"

"Sire, your majesty told me that there was a horse lying dead in the cross-road of the Bois-Rochin, and I began, therefore, by studying the roads. I say the roads, because the center of the cross-road is reached by four separate roads. The one that I myself took was the only one that presented any fresh traces. Two horses had followed it side by side; their eight feet were marked very distinctly in the clay. One of the riders was more impatient than the other, for the footprints of the one were invariably in advance of the other about half a horse's length."

"Are you quite sure they were travelling together?" said the king.

"Yes, sire. The horses are two rather large animals of equal pace,—horses well used to maneuvers of all kinds, for they wheeled round the barrier of the Rond-point together."

"Well—and after?"

"The two cavaliers paused there for a minute, no doubt to arrange the conditions of the engagement; the horses grew restless and impatient. One of the riders

spoke, while the other listened and seemed to have contented himself by simply answering. His horse pawed the ground, which proves that his attention was so taken up by listening that he let the bridle fall from his hand."

"A hostile meeting did take place then?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Continue; you are a very accurate observer."

"One of the two cavaliers remained where he was standing, the one, in fact, who had been listening; the other crossed the open space, and at first placed himself directly opposite to his adversary. The one who had remained stationary traversed the Rond-point at a gallop, about two-thirds of its length, thinking that by this means he would gain upon his opponent; but the latter had followed the circumference of the wood."

"You are ignorant of their names, I suppose?"

"Completely so, sire. Only he who followed the circumference of the wood was mounted on a black horse."

"How do you know that?"

"I found a few hairs of his tail among the brambles which bordered the sides of the ditch."

"Go on."

"As for the other horse, there can be no trouble in describing him, since he was left dead on the field of battle."

"What was the cause of his death?"

"A ball which had passed through his brain."

"Was the ball that of a pistol or a gun?"

"It was a pistol-bullet, sire. Besides, the manner in which the horse was wounded explained to me the tactics of the man who had killed it. He had followed the circumference of the wood in order to take his adversary in flank. Moreover, I followed his foot-tracks on the grass."

"The tracks of the black horse, do you mean?"

"Yes, sire."

"Go on, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"As your majesty now perceives the position of the two adversaries, I will, for a moment, leave the cavalier who had remained stationary for the one who started off at a gallop."

"Do so."

"The horse of the cavalier who rode at full speed was killed on the spot."

"How do you know that?"

"The cavalier had not time even to throw himself off his horse, and so fell with it. I observed the impression of his leg, which, with a great effort, he was enabled to extricate from under the horse. The spur, pressed down by the weight of the animal, had plowed up the ground."

"Very good; and what did he do as soon as he rose up again?"

"He walked straight up to his adversary."

"Who still remained upon the verge of the forest?"

"Yes, sire. Then, having reached a favorable distance, he stopped firmly, for the impression of both his heels are left in the ground quite close to each other, fired, and missed his adversary."

"How do you know he did not hit him."

"I found a hat with a ball through it."

"Ah, a proof, then!" exclaimed the king.

"Insufficient, sire," replied D'Artagnan, coldly; "it is a hat without any letters indicating its ownership, without arms; a red feather, as all hats have; the lace even, had nothing particular in it."

"Did the man with the hat through which the bullet had passed fire a second time?"

"Oh, sire, he had already fired twice."

"How did you ascertain that?"

"I found the waddings of the pistol."

"And what became of the bullet which did not kill the horse?"

"It cut in two the feather of the hat belonging to him against whom it was directed, and broke a small birch at the other end of the open glade."

"In that case, then, the man on the black horse was disarmed, whilst his adversary had still one more shot to fire?"

"Sire, while the dismounted rider was extricating himself from his horse, the other was reloading his pistol. Only, he was much agitated while he was loading it, and his hand trembled greatly."

"How do you know that?"

"Half the charge fell to the ground, and he threw the ramrod aside, not having time to replace it in the pistol."

"Monsieur D'Artagnan, this is marvelous you tell me."

"It is only close observation, sire, and the commonest highwayman could tell as much."

"The whole scene is before me from the manner in which you relate it."

"I have, in fact, reconstructed it in my own mind, with merely a few alterations."

"And now," said the king, "let us return to the dismounted cavalier. You were saying that he walked towards his adversary while the latter was loading his pistol."

"Yes; but at the very moment he himself was taking aim, the other fired."

"Oh!" said the king; "and the shot?"

"The shot told terribly, sire; the dismounted cavalier fell upon his face, after having staggered forward three or four paces."

"Where was he hit?"

"In two places; in the first place, in his right hand, and then, by the same bullet, in his chest."

"But how could you ascertain that?" inquired the king, full of admiration."

"By a very simple means; the butt end of the pistol was covered with blood, and the trace of the bullet could be observed with fragments of a broken ring. The wounded man, in all probability, had the ring finger and the little finger carried off."

"As far as the hand goes, I have nothing to say; but the chest?"

"Sire, there were two small pools of blood, at a distance of about two feet and a half from each other. At one of these pools of blood the grass was torn up by the clenched hand; at the other, the grass was simply pressed down by the weight of the body."

"Poor De Guiche!" exclaimed the king.

"Ah! it was M. de Guiche, then?" said the musketeer quietly. "I suspected it, but did not venture to mention it to your majesty."

"And what made you suspect it?"

"I recognized the De Grammont arms upon the holsters of the dead horse."

"And you think he is seriously wounded?"

"Very seriously; since he fell immediately, and remained a long time in the same place; however, he was able to walk, as he left the spot, supported by two friends."

"You met him returning, then?"

"No; but I observed the footprints of three men; the one on the right and the one on the left walked freely and easily, but the one in the middle dragged his feet as he walked; besides, he left traces of blood at every step he took."

"Now, monsieur, since you saw the combat so distinctly that not a single detail seems to have escaped you, tell me something about De Guiche's adversary."

"Oh, sire, I do not know him."

"And yet you see everything very clearly."

"Yes, sire, I see everything; but I do not tell all I see;

and, since the poor devil has escaped, your majesty will permit me to say that I do not intend to denounce him."

"And yet he is guilty, since he has fought a duel, monsieur."

"Not guilty in my eyes, sire," said D'Artagnan, coldly.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the king, "are you aware of what you are saying?"

"Perfectly, sire; but, according to my notions, a man who fights a duel is a brave man; such, at least, is my own opinion; but your majesty may have another, it is but natural, for you are master here."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I ordered you, however——"

D'Artagnan interrupted the king by a respectful gesture. "You ordered me, sire, to gather what particulars I could, respecting a hostile meeting that had taken place; those particulars you have. If you order me to arrest M. de Guiche's adversary, I will do so; but do not order me to denounce him to you, for in that case I will not obey."

"Very well! Arrest him, then."

"Give me his name, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily; but after a moment's reflection, he said, "You are right—ten times, twenty times, a hundred times right."

"That is my opinion, sire: I am happy that, this time, it accords with your majesty's."

"One word more. Who assisted Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire."

"But you speak of two men. There was a person present, then, as second."

"There was no second, sire. Nay, more than that, when M. de Guiche fell, his adversary fled without giving him any assistance."

"The miserable coward!" exclaimed the king.

"The consequence of your ordinances, sire. If a man

has fought well, and fairly, and has already escaped one chance of death, he naturally wishes to escape a second. M. de Botteville cannot be forgotten very easily."

"And so, men turn cowards."

"No, they become prudent."

"And he has fled, then, you say?"

"Yes; and as fast as his horse could possibly carry him."

"In what direction?"

"In the direction of the château."

"Well, and after all that?"

"Afterwards, as I have had the honor of telling your majesty, two men on foot arrived, who carried M. de Guiche back with them."

"What proof have you that these men arrived after the combat?"

"A very evident proof, sire; at the moment the encounter took place, the rain had just ceased, the ground had not had time to imbibe the moisture, and was, consequently, soaked; the footsteps sank in the ground; but while M. de Guiche was lying there in a fainting condition, the ground became firm again, and the footsteps made a less sensible impression."

Louis clapped his hands together in sign of admiration. "Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, "you are positively the cleverest man in my kingdom."

"The identical thing M. de Richelieu thought, and M. de Mazarin said, sire."

"And now, it remains for us to see if your sagacity is at fault."

"Oh! sire, a man may be mistaken; *humanum est errare*," said the musketeer, philosophically.

"In that case, you are not human, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for I believe you never are mistaken."

"Your majesty said, that we were going to see whether such was the case, or not."

"Yes."

"In what way, may I venture to ask?"

"I have sent for M. de Manicamp, and M. de Manicamp is coming."

"And M. de Manicamp knows the secret?"

"De Guiche has no secrets from M. de Manicamp."

D'Artagnan shook his head. "No one was present at the combat, I repeat; and unless M. de Manicamp was one of the two men who brought him back——"

"Hush!" said the king, "he is coming; remain, and listen attentively."

"Very good, sire."

And, at the very same moment, Manicamp and Saint-Aignan appeared at the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

THE king signified with an imperious gesture, first to the musketeer, then to Saint-Aignan, "On your lives, not a word." D'Artagnan withdrew, like a sentinel, to a corner of the room; Saint-Aignan, in his character of favorite, leaned over the back of the king's chair. Manicamp, with his right foot properly advanced, a smile upon his lips, and his white and well-formed hands gracefully disposed, advanced to make his reverence to the king, who returned the salutation by a bow. "Good-evening, M. de Manicamp," he said.

"Your majesty did me the honor to send for me," said Manicamp.

"Yes, in order to learn from you all the details of the unfortunate accident which has befallen the Comte de Guiche."

"Oh! sire, it is grievous indeed."

"You were there?"

"Not precisely, sire."

"But you arrived on the scene of the accident, a few minutes after it took place?"

"Sire, about half an hour afterwards."

"And where did the accident happen?"

"I believe, sire, the place is called the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin."

"Oh! the rendezvous of the hunt."

"The very spot, sire."

"Good; give me all the details you are acquainted with, respecting this unhappy affair, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Perhaps your majesty has already been informed of them, and I fear to fatigue you with useless repetitions."

"No, do not be afraid of that."

Manicamp looked round him; he only saw D'Artagnan leaning with his back against the wainscot—D'Artagnan, calm, kind, and good-natured as usual—and Saint-Aignan whom he had accompanied, and who still leaned over the king's arm-chair with an expression of countenance equally full of good feeling. He determined, therefore, to speak out. "Your majesty is perfectly aware," he said, "that accidents are very frequent in hunting."

"In hunting, do you say?"

"I mean, sire, when an animal is brought to bay."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "it was when the animal was brought to bay, then, that the accident happened?"

"Alas! sire, unhappily, it was."

The king paused for a moment before he said: "What animal was being hunted?"

"A wild boar, sire."

"And what could possibly have possessed De Guiche to go to a wild boar-hunt by himself; that is but a clownish

idea of sport, only fit for that class of people who, unlike the Maréchal de Grammont, have no dogs and huntsmen, to hunt as gentlemen should do."

Manicamp shrugged his shoulders. "Youth is very rash," he said, sententiously.

"Well, go on," said the king.

"At all events," continued Manicamp, not venturing to be too precipitate and hasty, and letting his words fall very slowly one by one, "at all events, sire, poor De Guiche went hunting—all alone."

"Quite alone? indeed?—What a sportsman! And is not M. de Guiche aware that the wild boar always stands at bay?"

"That is the very thing that really happened, sire."

"He had some idea, then, of the beast being there?"

"Yes, sire, some peasants had seen it among their potatoes."

"And what kind of animal was it?"

"A short, thick beast."

"You may as well tell me, monsieur, that De Guiche had some idea of committing suicide; for I have seen him hunt, and he is an active and vigorous hunter. Whenever he fires at an animal brought to bay and held in check by the dogs, he takes every possible precaution, and yet he fires with a carbine, and on this occasion he seems to have faced the boar with pistols only."

Manicamp started.

"A costly pair of pistols, excellent weapons to fight a duel with a man and not with a wild boar. What an absurdity!"

"There are some things, sire, which are difficult of explanation."

"You are quite right, and the event which we are now discussing is certainly one of them. Go on."

During the recital, Saint-Aignan, who probably would have

made a sign to Manicamp to be careful what he was about, found that the king's glance was constantly fixed upon himself, so that it was utterly impossible to communicate with Manicamp in any way. As for D'Artagnan, the statue of Silence at Athens was far more noisy and far more expressive than he. Manicamp, therefore, was obliged to continue in the same way he had begun, and so contrived to get more and more entangled in his explanation. "Sire," he said, "This is probably how the affair happened. Guiche was waiting to receive the boar as it rushed towards him."

"On foot or on horseback?" inquired the king.

"On horseback. He fired upon the brute and missed his aim, and then it dashed upon him."

"And the horse was killed."

"Ah! your majesty knows that, then."

"I have been told that a horse has been found lying dead in the cross-roads of the Bois-Rochin, and I presume it was De Guiche's horse."

"Perfectly true, sire, it was his."

"Well, so much for the horse, and now for De Guiche?"

"De Guiche, once down, was attacked and worried by the wild boar, and wounded in the hand and in the chest."

"It is a horrible accident, but it must be admitted it was De Guiche's own fault. How could he possibly have gone to hunt such an animal merely armed with pistols; he must have forgotten the fable of Adonis?"

Manicamp rubbed his ear in seeming perplexity. "Very true," he said, "it was very imprudent."

"Can you explain it, Monsieur Manicamp?"

"Sire, what is written is written!"

"Ah! you are a fatalist."

Manicamp looked very uncomfortable and ill at ease.

"I am angry with you, Monsieur Manicamp," continued the king.

"With me, sire?"

"Yes. How was it that you, who are De Guiche's intimate friend, and who know that he is subject to such acts of folly, did not stop him in time?"

Manicamp no longer knew what to do; the tone in which the king spoke was anything but that of a credulous man. On the other hand, it did not indicate any particular severity, nor did he seem to care very much about the cross-examination. There was more of raillery in it than menace. "And you say, then," continued the king, "that it was positively De Guiche's horse that was found dead?"

"Quite positive, sire."

"Did that astonish you?"

"No, sire; for your majesty will remember that, at the last hunt, M. de Saint-Maure had a horse killed under him, and in the same way."

"Yes, but that one was ripped open."

"Of course, sire."

"Had Guiche's horse been ripped open like M. de Saint-Maure's horse, I should not have been astonished."

Manicamp opened his eyes very wide.

"Am I mistaken," resumed the king, "was it not in the frontal bone that De Guiche's horse was struck? You must admit, Monsieur de Manicamp, that that is a very singular place for a wild-boar to attack?"

"You are aware, sire, that the horse is a very intelligent animal, and he doubtless endeavored to defend himself."

"But a horse defends himself with his heels and not with his head."

"In that case, the terrified horse may have slipped or fallen down," said Manicamp, "and the boar, you understand, sire, the boar——"

"Oh! I understand that perfectly, as far as the horse is concerned; but how about his rider?"

"Well! that, too, is simple enough; the boar left the horse and attacked the rider; and, as I have already had the honor of informing your majesty, shattered De Guiche's hand at the very moment he was about to discharge his second pistol at him, and then, with a gouge of his tusk, made that terrible hole in his chest."

"Nothing is more likely; really, Monsieur de Manicamp, you are wrong in placing so little confidence in your own eloquence, and you can tell a story most admirably."

"Your majesty is exceedingly kind," said Manicamp, saluting him in the most embarrassed manner.

"From this day henceforth, I will prohibit any gentleman attached to my court going to a similar encounter. Really, one might just as well permit dueling."

Manicamp started, and moved as if he were about to withdraw. "Is your majesty satisfied?"

"Delighted; but do not withdraw yet, Monsieur de Manicamp," said Louis, "I have something to say to you."

"Well, well!" thought D'Artagnan, "there is another who is not up to the mark;" and he uttered a sigh which might signify, "Oh! the men of *our* stamp, where are they *now*?"

At this moment an usher lifted up the curtain before the door, and announced the king's physician.

"Ah!" exclaimed Louis, "here comes Monsieur Valot, who has just been to see M. de Guiche. We shall now hear news of the man maltreated by the boar."

Manicamp felt more uncomfortable than ever.

"In this way, at least," added the king, "our conscience will be quite clear." And he looked at D'Artagnan, who did not seem in the slightest degree discomposed.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PHYSICIAN.

M. VALOT entered. The position of the different persons present was precisely the same; the king was seated, Saint-Aignan leaning over the back of his arm-chair, D'Artagnan with his back against the wall, and Manicamp still standing.

"Well, M. Valot," said the king, "did you obey my directions?"

"With the greatest alacrity, sire."

"You went to the doctor's house in Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, sire."

"And you found M. de Guiche there?"

"I did, sire."

"What state was he in?—speak unreservedly."

"In a very sad state, indeed, sire."

"The wild boar did not quite devour him, however?"

"Devour whom?"

"De Guiche."

"What wild boar?"

"The boar that wounded him."

"M. de Guiche wounded by a boar!"

"So it is said at least."

"By a poacher, rather, or by a jealous husband, or an ill-used lover, who, in order to be revenged, fired upon him."

"What is that you say, Monsieur Valot? Were not M. de Guiche's wounds produced by defending himself against a wild boar?"

"M. de Guiche's wounds are the result of a pistol-bullet

that broke his ring-finger and the little finger of the right hand, and afterwards buried itself in the intercostal muscles of the chest."

"A bullet! Are you sure Monsieur de Guiche was wounded by a *bullet*?" exclaimed the king, pretending to look much surprised.

"Indeed I am, sire; so sure, in fact, that here it is." And he presented to the king a half-flattened bullet, which the king looked at, but did not touch.

"Did he have that in his chest, poor fellow?" he asked.

"Not precisely. The ball did not penetrate, but was flattened, as you see, either upon the trigger of the pistol or upon the right side of the breast-bone."

"Good Heavens!" said the king, seriously, "you said nothing to me about this, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Sire——"

"What does all this mean, then, this invention about hunting a wild-boar at nightfall? Come, speak, monsieur."

"Sire——"

"It seems, then, that you are right," said the king, turning round towards his captain of musketeers, "and that a duel actually took place."

The king possessed, to a greater extent than any one else, the faculty enjoyed by the great in power or position, of compromising and dividing those beneath him. Manicamp darted a look full of reproaches at the musketeer. D'Artagnan understood the look at once, and not wishing to remain beneath the weight of such an accusation, advanced a step forward, and said: "Sire, your majesty commanded me to go and explore the place where the cross-roads meet in the Bois-Rochin, and to report to you, according to my own ideas, what had taken place there. I submitted my observations to you, but without denouncing any one. It was your majesty yourself who was the first to name the Comte de Guiche."

"Well, monsieur, well," said the king, haughtily; "you have done your duty, and I am satisfied with you. But you, Monsieur de Manicamp, have failed in yours, for you have told me a falsehood."

"A falsehood, sire. The expression is a hard one."

"Find a more accurate, then."

"Sire, I will not attempt to do so. I have already been unfortunate enough to displease your majesty, and it will, in every respect, be far better for me to accept most humbly any reproaches you may think proper to address to me."

"You are right, monsieur, whoever conceals the truth from me, risks my displeasure."

"Sometimes, sire, one is ignorant of the truth."

"No further falsehood, monsieur, or I double the punishment."

Manicamp bowed and turned pale. D'Artagnan again made another step forward, determined to interfere, if the still increasing anger of the king attained certain limits.

"You see, monsieur," continued the king, "that it is useless to deny the thing any longer. M. de Guiche has fought a duel."

"I do not deny it, sire, and it would have been truly generous on your majesty's part not to have forced me to tell a falsehood."

"Forced? Who forced you?"

"Sire, M. de Guiche is my friend. Your majesty has forbidden duels under pain of death. A falsehood might save my friend's life, and I told it."

"Good!" murmured D'Artagnan, "an excellent fellow, upon my word."

"Instead of telling a falsehood, monsieur, you should have prevented him from fighting," said the king.

"Oh! sire, your majesty, who is the most accomplished

gentleman in France, knows quite as well as any of us other gentlemen that we have never considered M. de Botteville dishonored for having suffered death on the Place de Grève. That which does in truth dishonor a man is to avoid meeting his enemy—not to avoid meeting his executioner!”

“Well, monsieur, that may be so,” said Louis XIV.; “I am desirous of suggesting a means of your repairing all.”

“If it be a means of which a gentleman may avail himself, I shall most eagerly seize the opportunity.”

“The name of M. de Guiche’s adversary?”

“Oh! oh!” murmured D’Artagnan, “are we going to take Louis XIII. as a model?”

“Sire!” said Manicamp, with an accent of reproach.

“You will not name him, then?” said the king.

“Sire, I do not know him.”

“Bravo!” murmured D’Artagnan.

“Monsieur de Manicamp, hand your sword to the captain.”

Manicamp bowed very gracefully, unbuckled his sword, smiling as he did so, and handed it for the musketeer to take. But Saint-Aignan advanced hurriedly between him and D’Artagnan. “Sire,” he said, “will your majesty permit me to say a word?”

“Do so,” said the king, delighted perhaps at the bottom of his heart, for some one to step between him and the wrath he felt had carried him too far.

“Manicamp, you are a brave man, and the king will appreciate your conduct; but to wish to serve your friends too well, is to destroy them. Manicamp, you know the name the king asks you for?”

“It is perfectly true—I do know it.”

“You will give it up then?”

“If I felt I ought to have mentioned it, I should have already done so.”

"Then I will tell it, for I am not so extremely sensitive on such points of honor as you are."

"You are at liberty to do so, but it seems to me, however——"

"Oh! a truce to magnanimity; I will not permit you to go to the Bastille in that way. Do you speak; or I will."

Manicamp was keen-witted enough, and perfectly understood that he had done quite sufficient to produce a good opinion of his conduct; it was now only a question of persevering in such a manner as to regain the good graces of the king. "Speak, monsieur," he said to Saint-Aignan; "I have on my own behalf done all that my conscience told me to do; and it must have been very importunate," he added, turning towards the king, "since its mandates led me to disobey your majesty's commands; but your majesty will forgive me, I hope, when you learn that I was anxious to preserve the honor of a lady."

"Of a lady?" said the king, with some uneasiness.

"Yes, sire."

"A lady was the cause of this duel?"

Manicamp bowed.

"If the position of the lady in question warrants it," he said, "I shall not complain of your having acted with so much circumspection; on the contrary, indeed."

"Sire, everything which concerns your majesty's household, or the household of your majesty's brother, is of importance in my eyes."

"In my brother's household," repeated Louis XIV., with a slight hesitation. "The cause of the duel was a lady belonging to my brother's household, do you say?"

"Or to Madame's."

"Ah! to Madame's?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well—and this lady?"

"Is one of the maids of honor of her royal highness Madame la Duchess D'Orleans."

"For whom M. De Guiche fought—do you say?"

"Yes, sir, and, this time, I tell no falsehood."

Louis seemed restless and anxious. "Gentlemen," he said, turning towards the spectators of this scene, "will you have the goodness to retire for a moment. I wish to be alone with M. de Manicamp; I know he has some important communication to make for his own justification, and which he will not venture before witnesses. . . . Put up your sword, M. de Manicamp."

Manicamp returned his sword to his belt.

"The fellow decidedly has his wits about him," murmured the musketeer, taking Saint-Aignan by the arm, and withdrawing with him.

"He will get out of it," said the latter in D'Artagnan's ear.

"And with honor, too, comte."

Manicamp cast a glance of recognition at Saint-Aignan and the captain, which luckily passed unnoticed by the king.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, as he left the room, "I had an indifferent opinion of the new generation. Well, I was mistaken after all. There is some good in them, I perceive."

Valot preceded the favorite and the captain, leaving the king and Manicamp alone in the cabinet.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHEREIN D'ARTAGNAN PERCEIVES THAT IT WAS HE WHO WAS MISTAKEN, AND MANICAMP WHO WAS RIGHT.

THE king, determined to be satisfied that no one was listening, went himself to the door, and then returned precipitately and placed himself opposite to Manicamp.

"And now we are alone, Monsieur de Manicamp, explain yourself?"

"With the greatest frankness, sire," replied the young man.

"And, in the first place, pray understand," added the king, "that there is nothing to which I personally attach a greater importance than the honor of *any* lady."

"That is the very reason, sire, why I endeavored to study your delicacy of sentiment and feeling."

"Yes, I understand it all now. You say that it was one of the maids of honor of my sister-in-law who was the subject of dispute, and that the person in question, De Guiche's adversary, the man, in point of fact, whom you will not name——"

"But whom M. de Saint-Aignan will name, Monsieur."

"Yes, you say, however, that this man insulted some one belonging to the household of Madame."

"Yes, sire. Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Ah!" said the king, as if he had expected the name, and yet as if its announcement had caused him a sudden pang; "ah! it was Mademoiselle de la Vallière who was insulted."

"I do not say precisely that she was insulted, sire."

"But at all events——"

"I merely say that she was spoken of in terms far enough from respectful."

"A man dares to speak in disrespectful terms of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and yet you refuse to tell me the name of the insulter?"

"Sire, I thought it was quite understood that your majesty had abandoned the idea of making me denounce him."

"Perfectly true, monsieur," returned the king, controlling his anger; "besides, I shall know in good time the name of this man whom I shall feel it my duty to punish."

Manicamp perceived that they had returned to the question again. As for the king, he saw he had allowed himself to be hurried away a little too far, and therefore continued:—"And I will punish him—not because there is any question of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, although I esteem her very highly—but because a lady was the object of the quarrel. And I intend that ladies shall be respected at my court, and that quarrels shall be put a stop to altogether."

Manicamp bowed.

"And now, Monsieur de Manicamp," continued the king, "what was said about Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Cannot your majesty guess?"

"I?"

"Your majesty can imagine the character of the jest in which young men permit themselves to indulge."

"They very probably said that she was in love with some one?" the king ventured to remark.

"Probably so."

"But Mademoiselle de la Vallière has a perfect right to love any one she pleases," said the king.

"That is the very point De Guiche maintained."

"And on account of which he fought, do you mean?"

"Yes, sire, the sole and only cause."

The king colored. "And you do not know anything more, then?"

"In what respect, sire?"

"In the very interesting respect which you are now referring to."

"What does your majesty wish to know?"

"Why, the name of the man with whom La Vallière is in love, and whom De Guiche's adversary disputed her right to love."

"Sire, I know nothing—I have heard nothing—and have learnt nothing, even accidentally; but De Guiche is a noble-hearted fellow, and if, momentarily, he substituted himself in the place or stead of La Vallière's protector, it was because that protector was himself of too exalted a position to undertake her defense."

These words were more than transparent; they made the king blush, but this time with pleasure. He struck Manicamp gently on the shoulder. "Well, well, Monsieur de Manicamp, you are not only a ready, witty fellow, but a brave gentleman besides, and your friend De Guiche is a paladin quite after my own heart; you will express that to him from me."

"Your majesty forgives me, then?"

"Completely."

"And I am free?"

The king smiled and held out his hand to Manicamp, which he took and kissed respectfully. "And then," added the king, "you relate stories so charmingly."

"I, sire!"

"You told me in the most admirable manner the particulars of the accident which happened to Guiche. I can see the wild boar rushing out of the wood—I can see the horse fall down fighting with his head and the boar rush

from the horse to the rider. You do not simply relate a story well: you positively paint its incidents."

"Sire, I think your majesty condescends to laugh at my expense," said Manicamp.

"On the contrary," said Louis, seriously, "I have so little intention of laughing, Monsieur de Manicamp, that I wish you to relate this adventure to every one."

"The adventure of the hunt?"

"Yes; in the same manner you told it to me, without changing a single word—you *understand*?"

"Perfectly, sire."

"And you will relate it, then?"

"Without losing a minute."

"Very well! and now summon M. D'Artagnan; I hope you are no longer afraid of him."

"Oh, sire, from the very moment I am sure of your majesty's kind disposition, I no longer fear anything!"

"Call him, then," said the king.

Manicamp opened the door, and said, "Gentlemen, the king wishes you to return."

D'Artagnan, Saint-Aignan, and Valot entered.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "I summoned you for the purpose of saying that Monsieur de Manicamp's explanation has entirely satisfied me."

L'Artagnan glanced at Valot and Saint-Aignan, as much as to say, "Well! did I not tell you so?"

The king led Manicamp to the door, and then in a low tone of voice said—"See that M. de Guiche takes good care of himself, and particularly that he recovers as soon as possible; I am very desirous of thanking him in the name of every lady, but let him take special care that he does not begin again."

"Were he to die a hundred times, sire, he would begin again if your majesty's honor were in any way called in question."

This remark was direct enough. But we have already said that the incense of flattery was very pleasing to the king, and, provided he received it, he was not very particular as to its quality.

"Very well, very well," he said, as he dismissed Manicamp, "I will see De Guiche myself, and make him listen to reason." And as Manicamp left the apartment, the king turned round towards the three spectators of this scene, and said, "Tell me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, how does it happen that your sight is so imperfect?—you, whose eyes are generally so very good."

"My sight bad, sire?"

"Certainly."

"It must be the case since your majesty says so; but in what respect, may I ask?"

"Why, with regard to what occurred in the Bois-Rochin."

"Ah! ah!"

"Certainly. You pretend to have seen the tracks of two horses, to have detected the foot-prints of two men; and have described the particulars of an engagement, which you assert took place. Nothing of the sort occurred; pure illusion on your part."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly the same thing with the galloping to and fro of the horses, and the other indications of a struggle. It was the struggle of De Guiche against the wild boar, and absolutely nothing else; only the struggle was a long and a terrible one, it seems."

"Ah! ah!" continued D'Artagnan.

"And when I think that I almost believed it for a moment; but, then, you told it with such confidence."

"I admit, sire, that I must have been very short-sighted," said D'Artagnan, with a readiness of humor which delighted the king.

"You do admit, then?"

"Admit it, sire, most assuredly I do."

"So that now you see the thing——"

"In quite a different light from that in which I saw it half an hour ago."

"And to what, then, do you attribute this difference in your opinion?"

"Oh! a very simple thing, sire; half an hour ago I returned from the Bois-Rochin, where I had nothing to light me but a stupid stable lantern——"

"While now?"

"While now, I have all the wax-lights of your cabinet, and more than that, your majesty's own eyes, which illuminate everything, like the blazing sun at noonday."

The king began to laugh; and Saint-Aignan broke out into convulsions of merriment.

"It is precisely like M. Valot," said D'Artagnan, resuming the conversation where the king had left off; "he has been imagining all along, that, not only was M. de Guiche wounded by a bullet, but still more, that he extracted it, even, from his chest."

"Upon my word," said Valot, "I assure you——"

"Now, did you not believe that?" continued D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Valot; "not only did I believe it, but, at this very moment, I would swear it."

"Well, my dear doctor, you have dreamt it."

"I have dreamt it!"

"M. de Guiche's wound—a mere dream; the bullet, a dream. So, take my advice, and prate no more about it."

"Well said," returned the king, "M. d'Artagnan's advice is sound. Do not speak of your dream to any one, Monsieur Valot, and, upon the word of a gentleman, you will have no occasion to repent it. Good-evening, gentlemen; a very sad affair, indeed, is a wild boar hunt!"

"A very serious thing, indeed," repeated D'Artagnan, in a loud voice, "is a wild-boar hunt!" and he repeated it in every room through which he passed; and left the château, taking Valot with him.

"And now we are alone," said the king to Saint-Aignan, "what is the name of De Guiche's adversary?"

Saint-Aignan looked at the king.

"Oh! do not hesitate," said the king; "you know that I am bound beforehand to forgive."

"De Wardes," said Saint-Aignan.

"Very good," said Louis XVI.; and then, retiring to his own room, added to himself, "To forgive is not to forget."

CHAPTER L.

SHOWING THE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW.

MANICAMP quitted the king's apartment, delighted at having succeeded so well, when, just as he reached the bottom of the staircase and was passing a doorway, he felt that some one suddenly pulled him by the sleeve. He turned round and recognized Montalais, who was waiting for him in the passage, and who, in a very mysterious manner, with her body bent forward, and in a low tone of voice, said to him, "Follow me, monsieur, and without any delay, if you please."

"Where to, mademoiselle?" inquired Manicamp.

"In the first place, a true knight would not have asked such a question, but would have followed me without requiring any explanation."

"Well, mademoiselle, I am quite ready to conduct myself as a true knight."

"No; it is too late, and you cannot take the credit of it. We are going to Madame's apartment, so come at once."

"Ah! ah!" said Manicamp. "Lead on, then."

And he followed Montalais, who ran before him as light as Galatea.

"This time," said Manicamp, as he followed his guide, "I do not think that stories about hunting expeditions would be acceptable. We will try, however, and if need be—well, if there should be any occasion for it, we must try something else."

Montalais still ran on.

"How fatiguing it is," thought Manicamp, "to have need of one's head and legs at the same time."

At last, however, they arrived. Madame had just finished undressing, and was in a most elegant *dishabille*, but it must be understood that she had changed her dress before she had any idea of being subjected to the emotions now agitating her. She was waiting with the most restless impatience; and Montalais and Manicamp found her standing near the door. At the sound of their approaching footsteps, Madame came forward to meet them.

"Ah!" she said, "at last!"

"Here is M. Manicamp," replied Montalais.

Manicamp bowed with the greatest respect; Madame signed to Montalais to withdraw, and she immediately obeyed. Madame followed her with her eyes, in silence, until the door closed behind her, and then, turning towards Manicamp, said, "What is the matter?—and is it true, as I am told, Monsieur de Manicamp, that some one is lying wounded in the château?"

"Yes, madame, unfortunately so—Monsieur de Guiche."

"Yes, Monsieur de Guiche," repeated the princess. "I had, in fact, heard it rumored, but not confirmed. And

so, in truth, it is Monsieur de Guiche who has been thus unfortunate?"

"M. de Guiche himself, madame."

"Are you aware, M. de Manicamp," said the princess, hastily, "that the king has the strongest antipathy to duels?"

"Perfectly so, madame; but a duel with a wild beast is not answerable."

"Oh, you will not insult me by supposing that I credit the absurd fable reported, with what object I cannot tell, respecting M. de Guiche having been wounded by a wild boar. No, no, monsieur; the real truth is known, and, in addition to the inconvenience of his wound, M. de Guiche runs the risk of losing his liberty if not his life."

"Alas! madame, I am well aware of that, but what is to be done!"

"You have seen the king?"

"Yes, madame."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him how M. de Guiche went to the chase, and how a wild boar rushed forth out of the Bois-Rochin; how M. De Guiche fired at it, and how, in fact, the furious brute dashed at De Guiche, killed his horse, and grievously wounded himself."

"And the king believed that?"

"Implicitly."

"Oh, you surprise me, Monsieur de Manicamp; you surprise me very much."

And Madame walked up and down the room, casting a searching look from time to time at Manicamp, who remained motionless and impassible in the same place. At last she stopped.

"And yet," she said, "every one here seems unanimous in giving another cause for this wound."

"What cause, madame?" said Manicamp; "may I be

permitted, without indiscretion, to ask your highness?"

"You ask such a question! You, M. de Guiche's intimate friend, his confidant, indeed!"

"Oh, madame! his intimate friend—yes; confidant—no. De Guiche is a man who can keep his own secrets, who has some of his own certainly, but who never breathes a syllable about them. De Guiche is discretion itself, madame."

"Very well, then; those secrets which M. de Guiche keeps so scrupulously, I shall have the pleasure of informing you of," said the princess, almost spitefully; "for the king may possibly question you a second time, and if, on the second occasion, you were to repeat the same story to him, he possibly might not be very well satisfied with it."

"But, madame, I think your highness is mistaken with regard to the king. His majesty was perfectly satisfied with me, I assure you."

"In that case, permit me to assure you, Monsieur de Manicamp, it only proves one thing, which is, that his majesty is very easily satisfied."

"I think your highness is mistaken in arriving at such an opinion; his majesty is well known not to be contented except with very good reason."

"And do you suppose that he will thank you for your officious falsehood, when he will learn to-morrow that M. de Guiche had on behalf of his friend, M. de Bragelonne, a quarrel which ended in a hostile meeting?"

"A quarrel on M. de Bragelonne's account," said Manicamp, with the most innocent expression in the world; "what does your royal highness do me the honor to tell me?"

"What is there astonishing in that? M. de Guiche is susceptible, irritable, and easily loses his temper."

"Oh the contrary, madame, I know M. de Guiche to be

very patient, and never susceptible or irritable except upon very good grounds."

"But is not friendship a just ground?" said the princess.

"Oh, certainly, madame; and particularly for a heart like his."

"Very good; you will not deny, I suppose, that M. de Bragelonne is M. de Guiche's friend?"

"A great friend."

"Well, then, M. de Guiche had taken M. de Bragelonne's part; and as M. de Bragelonne was absent and could not fight, he fought for him."

Manicamp began to smile, and moved his head and shoulders very slightly, as much as to say, "Oh, if you will positively have it so——"

"But speak at all events," said the princess, out of patience; "speak!"

"I?"

"Of course; it is quite clear you are not of my opinion, and that you have something to say."

"I have only one thing to say, madame."

"Name it!"

"That I do not understand a single word of what you have just been telling me."

"What!—you do not understand a single word about M. de Guiche's quarrel with M. de Wardes," exclaimed the princess, almost out of temper.

Manicamp remained silent.

"A quarrel," she continued, "which arose out of a conversation scandalous in its tone and purport, and more or less well founded, respecting the virtue of a certain lady."

"Ah! of a certain lady,—this is quite another thing," said Manicamp.

"You begin to understand, do you not?"

"Your highness will excuse me, but I dare not——"

"You dare not," said Madame, exasperated; "very well, then, wait one moment, I will dare."

"Madame, madame!" exclaimed Manicamp, as if in great dismay, "be careful of what you are going to say."

"It would seem, monsieur, that, if I happened to be a man, you would challenge me, notwithstanding his majesty's edicts, as Monsieur de Guiche challenged M. de Wardes; and that, too, on account of the virtue of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Of Mademoiselle de la Vallière!" exclaimed Manicamp, starting backwards, as if that was the very last name he expected to hear pronounced.

"What makes you start in that manner, Monsieur de Manicamp?" said Madame, ironically; "do you mean to say you would be impertinent enough to suspect that young lady's honor?"

"Madame, in the whole course of this affair there has not been the slightest question of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's honor."

"What! when two men have almost blown each other's brains out on a woman's behalf, do you mean to say she has had nothing to do with the affair, and that her name has not been called in question at all? I did not think you so good a courtier, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Pray forgive me, madame," said the young man, "but we are very far from understanding one another. You do me the honor to speak one language while I am speaking altogether another."

"I beg your pardon, but I do not understand your meaning?"

"Forgive me then; but I fancied I understood your highness to remark that De Guiche and De Wardes had fought on Mademoiselle de la Vallière's account?"

"Certainly."

"On account of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I think you said?" repeated Manicamp.

"I do not say that M. de Guiche personally took an interest in Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I say that he did so as representing or acting on behalf of another."

"On behalf of another?"

"Come, do not always assume such a bewildered look. Does not every one here know that M. de Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that before he went on the mission with which the king intrusted him, he charged his friend M. de Guiche to watch over that interesting young lady."

"There is nothing more for me to say, then. Your highness is well-informed."

"Of everything. I beg you to understand that clearly."

Manicamp began to laugh, which almost exasperated the princess, who was not, as we know, of a very patient disposition.

"Madame," resumed the discreet Manicamp, saluting the princess, "let us bury this affair altogether in forgetfulness, for it will probably never be quite cleared up."

"Oh, as far as that goes there is nothing more to do, and the information is complete. The king will learn that M. de Guiche has taken up the cause of this little adventuress, who gives herself all the airs of a grand lady; he will learn that Monsieur de Bragelonne, having nominated his friend M. de Guiche his guardian-in-ordinary, the latter immediately fastened, as he was required to do, upon the Marquis de Wardes, who ventured to trench upon his privileges. Moreover, you cannot pretend to deny, Monsieur Manicamp—you who know everything so well—that the king on his side casts a longing eye upon this famous treasure, and that he will bear no slight grudge against M. de Guiche for constituting him-

self its defender. Are you sufficiently well informed now, or do you require anything further? If so, speak, monsieur."

"No, madame, there is nothing more I wish to know."

"Learn, however—for you ought to know it, Monsieur de Manicamp—learn that his majesty's indignation will be followed by terrible consequences. In princes of a similar temperament to that of his majesty, the passion which jealousy causes sweeps down like a whirlwind."

"Which you will temper, madame."

"I!" exclaimed the princess, with a gesture of indescribable irony; "I! and by what title, may I ask?"

"Because you detest injustice, madame."

"And according to your account, then, it would be an injustice to prevent the king arranging his love affairs as he pleases."

"You will intercede, however, in M. de Guiche's favor?"

"You are mad, monsieur," said the princess, in a haughty tone of voice.

"On the contrary, I am in the most perfect possession of my senses; and, I repeat, you will defend M. de Guiche before the king."

"Why should I?"

"Because the cause of M. de Guiche is your own, madame," said Manicamp, with ardor kindling in his eyes.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, madame, that, with respect to the defense which Monsieur de Guiche undertook in M. de Bragelonne's absence, I am surprised that your highness has not detected a pretext in La Vallière's name having been brought forward."

"A pretext? But a pretext for what?" repeated the princess, hesitatingly, for Manicamp's steady look had just revealed something of the truth to her.

"I trust, madame," said the young man, "I have said sufficient to induce your highness not to overwhelm before his majesty my poor friend, De Guiche, against whom all the malevolence of a party bitterly opposed to your own will now be directed."

"You mean, on the contrary, I suppose, that all those who have no great affection for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and even, perhaps, a few of those who have some regard for her, will be angry with the comte?"

"Oh, madame! why will you push your obstinacy to such an extent, and refuse to open your ears and listen to the counsel of one whose devotion to you is unbounded? Must I expose myself to the risk of your displeasure,—am I really to be called upon to name, contrary to my own wish, the person who was the real cause of this quarrel?"

"The person?" said Madame, blushing.

"Must I," continued Manicamp, "tell you how poor De Guiche became irritated, furious, exasperated beyond all control, at the different rumors now being circulated about this person? Must I, if you persist in this willful blindness, and if respect should continue to prevent me naming her,—must I, I repeat, recall to your recollection the various scenes which Monsieur had with the Duke of Buckingham, and the insinuations which were reported respecting the duke's exile? Must I remind you of the anxious care the comte always took in his efforts to please, to watch, to protect that person for whom alone he lives,—for whom alone he breathes? Well! I will do so; and when I shall have made you recall all the particulars I refer to, you will perhaps understand how it happened that the comte, having lost all control over himself, and having been for some time past almost harassed to death by De Wardes, became, at the first disrespectful expression which the latter pronounced respecting the

person in question, inflamed with passion, and panted only for an opportunity of avenging the affront."

The princess concealed her face with her hands. "Monsieur, monsieur!" she exclaimed; "do you know what you are saying, and to whom you are speaking?"

"And so, madame," pursued Manicamp, as if he had not heard the exclamations of the princess, "nothing will astonish you any longer,—neither the comte's ardor in seeking the quarrel, nor his wonderful address in transferring it to a quarter foreign to your own personal interests. That latter circumstance was, indeed, a marvelous instance of tact and perfect coolness, and if the person in whose behalf the comte so fought and shed his blood does, in reality, owe some gratitude to the poor wounded sufferer, it is not on account of the blood he has shed, or the agony he has suffered, but for the steps he has taken to preserve from comment or reflection an honor which is more precious to him than his own."

"Oh!" cried Madame, as if she had been alone, "is it possible the quarrel was on my account!"

Manicamp felt he could now breathe for a moment—and gallantly had he won the right to do so. Madame, on her side, remained for some time plunged in a painful reverie. Her agitation could be seen by her quick respiration, by her drooping eyelids, by the frequency with which she pressed her hand upon her heart. But, in her, coquetry was not so much a passive quality, as, on the contrary, a fire which sought for fuel to maintain itself, finding anywhere and everywhere what it required.

"If it be as you assert," she said, "the comte will have obliged two persons at the same time; for Monsieur de Bragelonne also owes a deep debt of gratitude to M. de Guiche—and with far greater reason indeed, because everywhere, and on every occasion, Mademoiselle de la

Vallière will be regarded as having been defended by this generous champion."

Manicamp perceived that there still remained some lingering doubt in the princess's heart. "A truly admirable service indeed," he said, "is the one he has rendered to Mademoiselle de la Vallière! A truly admirable service to M. de Bragelonne! The duel has created a sensation which, in some respects, casts a dishonorable suspicion upon that young girl; a sensation, indeed, which will embroil her with the vicomte. The consequence is that De Wardes' pistol-bullet has had three results instead of one; it destroys at the same time the honor of a woman, the happiness of a man, and, perhaps, it has wounded to death one of the best gentlemen in France. Oh, madame! your logic is cold—even calculating; it always condemns—it never absolves."

Manicamp's concluding words scattered to the winds the last doubt which lingered, not in Madame's heart, but in her mind. She was no longer a princess full of scruples, nor a woman with her ever-returning suspicions, but one whose heart had just felt the mortal chill of a wound. "Wounded to death!" she murmured, in a faltering voice, "oh, Monsieur de Manicamp! did you not say, wounded to death?"

Manicamp returned no other answer than a deep sigh.

"And so you said that the comte is dangerously wounded?" continued the princess.

"Yes, madame; one of his hands is shattered, and he has a bullet lodged in his breast."

"Gracious heavens!" resumed the princess, with a feverish excitement, "this is horrible! Monsieur de Manicamp! a hand shattered, do you say, and a bullet in his breast? And that coward! that wretch! that assassin, De Wardes, did it!"

Manicamp seemed overcome by a violent emotion. He

had, in fact, displayed no little energy in the latter part of his speech. As for Madame, she entirely threw aside all regard for the formal observances of propriety society imposes; for when, with her, passion spoke in accents either of anger or sympathy, nothing could restrain her impulses. Madame approached Manicamp, who had subsided in a chair, as if his grief were a sufficiently powerful excuse for his infraction of the laws of etiquette. "Monsieur," she said, seizing him by the hand, "be frank with me."

Manicamp looked up.

"Is M. de Guiche in danger of death?"

"Doubly so, madame," he replied; "in the first place on account of the hemorrhage which has taken place, an artery having been injured in the hand; and next, in consequence of the wound in his breast which may, the doctor is afraid, at least, have injured some vital part."

"He may die, then?"

"Die, yes, madame; and without even having had the consolation of knowing that you have been told of his devotion."

"You will tell him."

"I?"

"Yes; are you not his friend?"

"I? oh, no, madame; I will only tell M. de Guiche—if, indeed, he is still in a condition to hear me—I will only tell him what I have seen; that is, your cruelty to him."

"Oh, monsieur, you will not be guilty of such barbarity!"

"Indeed, madame, I shall speak the truth, for nature is very energetic in a man of his age. The physicians are clever men, and if, by chance, the poor comte should survive his wound, I should not wish him to die of a wound of the heart, after surviving one of the body." Manicamp

rose, and, with an expression of profound respect, seemed to be desirous of taking leave.

"At least, monsieur," said Madame, stopping him with almost a suppliant air, "you will be kind enough to tell me in what state your wounded friend is, and who is the physician who attends him?"

"As regards the state he is in, madame, he is seriously ill; his physician is M. Valot, his majesty's private medical attendant. M. Valot is moreover assisted by a professional friend, to whose house M. de Guiche has been carried."

"What! he is not in the château?" said Madame.

"Alas, madame! the poor fellow was so ill, that he could not even be conveyed thither."

"Give me the address, monsieur," said the princess, hurriedly; "I will send to inquire after him."

"Rue du Feurre; a brick-built house, with white outside-blinds. The doctor's name is on the door."

"You are returning to your wounded friend, Monsieur de Manicamp?"

"Yes, madame."

"You will be able, then, to do me a service."

"I am at your highness's orders."

"Do what you intended to do; return to M. de Guiche, send away all those whom you may find there, and have the kindness yourself to go away too."

"Madame——"

"Let us waste no time in useless explanations. Accept the fact as I present it to you; see nothing in it beyond what is really there, and ask nothing further than what I tell you. I am going to send one of my ladies, perhaps two, because it is now getting late; I do not wish them to see you, or rather I do not wish you to see them. These are scruples you can understand—you particularly,

Monsieur de Manicamp, who seem capable of divining so much."

"Oh, madame, perfectly; I can even do better still,—I will precede, or rather walk, in advance of your attendants; it will, at the same time, be the means of showing them the way more accurately, and of protecting them, if occasion arises, though there is no probability of their needing protection."

"And, by this means, then, they would be sure of entering without difficulty, would they not?"

"Certainly, madame; for as I should be the first to pass, I thus remove any difficulties that might chance to be in the way."

"Very well. Go, go, Monsieur de Manicamp, and wait at the bottom of the staircase."

"I go at once, madame."

"Stay."

Manicamp paused.

"When you hear the footsteps of two women descending the stairs, go out, and, without once turning round, take the road which leads to where the poor count is lying."

"But if, by any mischance, two other persons were to descend, and I were to be mistaken?"

"You will hear one of the two clap her hands together softly. Go."

Manicamp turned round, bowed once more, and left the room, his heart overflowing with joy. In fact, he knew very well that the presence of Madame herself would be the best balm to apply to his friend's wounds. A quarter of an hour had hardly elapsed when he heard the sound of a door opened softly, and closed with like precaution. He listened to the light footfalls gliding down the staircase, and then heard the signal agreed upon. He immediately went out, and, faithful to his promise, bent his way, without once turning his head, through the streets of Fontainebleau, towards the doctor's dwelling.

CHAPTER LI.

M. MALICORNE THE KEEPER OF THE RECORDS OF FRANCE.

Two women, their figures completely concealed by their mantles, and whose masks effectually hid the upper portion of their faces, timidly followed Manicamp's steps. On the first floor, behind curtains of red damask, the soft light of a lamp placed upon a low table faintly illumined the room, at the other extremity of which, on a large bedstead supported by spiral columns, around which curtains of the same color as those which deadened the rays of the lamp had been closely drawn, lay De Guiche, his head supported by pillows, his eyes looking as if the mists of death were gathering; his long black hair, scattered over the pillow, setting off the young man's hollow temples. It was easy to see that fever was the chief tenant of the chamber. De Guiche was dreaming. His wandering mind was pursuing, through gloom and mystery, one of those wild creations delirium engenders. Two or three drops of blood, still liquid, stained the floor. Manicamp hurriedly ran up the stairs, but paused at the threshold of the door, looked into the room, and seeing that everything was perfectly quiet, he advanced towards the foot of the large leathern arm-chair, a specimen of furniture of the reign of Henry IV., and seeing that the nurse, as a matter of course, had dropped off to sleep, he awoke her, and begged her to pass into the adjoining room.

Then, standing by the side of the bed, he remained for a moment deliberating whether it would be better to awaken Guiche, in order to acquaint him with the good

news. But, as he began to hear behind the door the rustling of silk dresses and the hurried breathing of his two companions, and as he already saw that the curtain screening the doorway seemed on the point of being impatiently drawn aside, he passed round the bed and followed the nurse into the next room. As soon as he had disappeared the curtain was raised, and his two female companions entered the room he had just left. The one who entered first made a gesture to her companion, which riveted her to the spot where she stood, close to the door, and then resolutely advanced towards the bed, drew back the curtains along the iron rod, and threw them in thick folds behind the head of the bed. She gazed upon the count's pallid face; remarked his right hand enveloped in linen whose dazzling whiteness was emphasized by the counterpane patterned with dark leaves thrown across the couch. She shuddered as she saw a stain of blood growing larger and larger upon the bandages. The young man's breast was uncovered, as though for the cool night air to assist his respiration. A narrow bandage fastened the dressings of the wound, around which a purplish circle of extravasated blood was gradually increasing in size. A deep sigh broke from her lips. She leaned against one of the columns of the bed, and gazed, through the apertures in her mask, upon the harrowing spectacle before her. A hoarse harsh groan passed like a death-rattle through the count's clenched teeth. The masked lady seized his left hand, which scorched like burning coals. But at the very moment she placed her icy hand upon it, the action of the cold was such that De Guiche opened his eyes, and by a look in which revived intelligence was dawning, seemed as though struggling back again into existence. The first thing upon which he fixed his gaze was this phantom standing erect by his bedside. At that sight, his eyes became dilated, but without any appear-

ance of consciousness in them. The lady thereupon made a sign to her companion, who had remained at the door; and in all probability the latter had already received her lesson, for in a clear tone of voice, and without any hesitation whatever, she pronounced these words:—"Monsieur la comte, her royal highness Madame is desirous of knowing how you are able to bear your wound, and to express to you, by my lips, her great regret at seeing you suffer."

As she pronounced the word Madame, Guiche started; he had not as yet remarked the person to whom the voice belonged, and he naturally turned towards the direction whence it proceeded. But, as he felt the cold hand still resting on his own, he again turned towards the motionless figure beside him. "Was it you who spoke, Madame?" he asked, in a weak voice, "or is there another person beside you in the room?"

"Yes," replied the figure, in an almost unintelligible voice, as she bent down her head.

"Well!" said the wounded man, with a great effort, "I thank you. Tell Madame that I no longer regret to die, since she has remembered me."

At the words "to die," pronounced by one whose life seemed to hang on a thread, the masked lady could not restrain her tears, which flowed under her mask, and appeared upon her cheeks just where the mask left her face bare. If De Guiche had been in fuller possession of his senses, he would have seen her tears roll like glistening pearls, and fall upon his bed. The lady, forgetting that she wore her mask, raised her hand as though to wipe her eyes, and meeting the rough velvet, she tore away her mask in anger, and threw it on the floor. At the unexpected apparition before him, which seemed to issue from a cloud, De Guiche uttered a cry and stretched his arms towards her; but every word perished on his lips, and his

strength seemed utterly abandoning him. His right hand, which had followed his first impulse, without calculating the amount of strength he had left, fell back again upon the bed, and immediately afterwards the white linen was stained with a larger spot than before. In the meantime, the young man's eyes became dim, and closed, as if he were already struggling with the messenger of death; and then, after a few involuntary movements, his head fell back motionless on his pillow;—his face grew livid. The lady was frightened; but on this occasion, contrary to what is usually the case, fear attracted. She leaned over the young man, gazed earnestly, fixedly at his pale cold face, which she almost touched, then imprinted a rapid kiss upon De Guiche's left hand, who, trembling as if an electric shock had passed through him, awoke a second time, opened his large eyes, incapable of recognition, and again fell into a state of complete insensibility. "Come," she said to her companion, "we must not remain here any longer; I shall be committing some folly or other."

"Madame, Madame, your highness is forgetting your mask!" said her vigilant companion.

"Pick it up," replied her mistress, as she tottered almost senseless towards the staircase, and as the outer door had been left only half-closed, the two women, light as birds, passed through it, and with hurried steps returned to the palace. One of them ascended towards Madame's apartments, where she disappeared: the other entered the rooms belonging to the maids of honor, namely, on the *entresol*, and having reached her own room, she sat down before a table, and without giving herself time even to breathe, wrote the following letter:—

"This evening Madame has been to see M. de Guiche. Everything is going on well on this side. See that your

news is equally exemplary, and do not forget to burn this paper."

She folded the letter, and leaving her room with every possible precaution, crossed a corridor which led to the apartments appropriated to the gentlemen attached to Monsieur's service. She stopped before a door, under which, having previously knocked twice in a short quick manner, she thrust the paper, and fled. Then, returning to her own room, she removed every trace of her having gone out, and also of having written the letter. Amid the investigations she was so diligently pursuing she perceived on the table the mask which belonged to Madame, and which, according to her mistress's directions, she had brought back but had forgotten to restore to her. "Oh! oh!" she said, "I must not forget to do to-morrow what I have forgotten to-day."

And she took hold of the velvet mask by that part which covered the cheeks, and feeling that her thumb was wet, looked at it. It was not only wet, but reddened. The mask had fallen upon one of the spots of blood which, we have already said, stained the floor, and from the black velvet outside which had accidentally come into contact with it, the blood had passed through to the inside, and stained the white cambric lining. "Oh! oh!" said Montalais, for doubtless our readers have already recognized her by these various maneuvers, "I shall not give back this mask; it is far too precious now."

And rising from her seat, she ran towards a box made of maple wood, which inclosed different articles of toilette and perfumery. "No, not here," she said, "such a treasure must not be abandoned to the slightest chance of detection."

Then, after a moment's silence, and with a smile that was peculiarly her own, she added:—"Beautiful mask,

stained with the blood of that brave knight, you shall go and join that collection of wonders, La Vallière's and Raoul's letters, that loving collection, indeed, which will some day or other form part of the history of France, of European royalty. You shall be placed under M. Malicorne's care," said the laughing girl, as she began to undress herself, "under the protection of that worthy M. Malicorne," she said, blowing out the taper, "who thinks he was born only to become the chief usher of Monsieur's apartments, and whom I will make keeper of the records and historiographer of the house of Bourbon, and of the first houses in the kingdom. Let him grumble now, that discontented Malicorne," she added, as she drew the curtains and fell asleep.

CHAPTER LII.

THE JOURNEY.

THE next day being agreed upon for the departure, the king, at eleven o'clock precisely, descended the grand staircase with the two queens and Madame, in order to enter his carriage drawn by six horses, that were pawing the ground in impatience at the foot of the staircase. The whole court awaited the royal appearance in the *Fer-à-cheval* crescent, in their traveling costumes; the large number of saddled horses and carriages of ladies and gentlemen of the court, surrounded by their attendants, servants, and pages, formed a spectacle whose brilliancy could scarcely be equaled. The king entered his carriage with the two queens; Madame was in the same one with Monsieur. The maids of honor followed their example, and took their seats, two by two, in the carriages destined for them. The weather was exceedingly warm; a

light breeze, which, early in the morning, all had thought would have proved sufficient to cool the air, soon became fiercely heated by the rays of the sun, although it was hidden behind the clouds, and filtered through the heated vapor which rose from the ground like a scorching wind, bearing particles of fine dust against the faces of the travelers. Madame was the first to complain of the heat. Monsieur's only reply was to throw himself back in the carriage, as though about to faint, and to inundate himself with scents and perfumes, uttering the deepest sighs all the while; whereupon Madame said to him, with her most amiable expression:—"Really, Monsieur, I fancied that you would have been polite enough, on account of the terrible heat, to have left me my carriage to myself, and to have performed the journey yourself on horseback."

"Ride on horseback!" cried the prince, with an accent of dismay which showed how little idea he had of adopting this unnatural advice; "you cannot suppose such a thing, madame! My skin would peel off if I were to expose myself to such a burning breeze as this."

Madame began to laugh.

"You can take my parasol," she said.

"But the trouble of holding it!" replied Monsieur, with the greatest coolness; "besides, I have no horse."

"What, no horse?" replied the princess, who, if she did not secure the solitude she required, at least obtained the amusement of teasing. No horse! You are mistaken, Monsieur; for I see your favorite bay out yonder."

"My bay horse!" exclaimed the prince, attempting to lean forward to look out of the door; but the movement he was obliged to make cost him so much trouble that he soon hastened to resume his immobility.

"Yes," said Madame; "your horse, led by M. de Malicorne."

"Poor beast," replied the prince; "how warm it must be!"

And with these words he closed his eyes, like a man on the point of death. Madame, on her side, reclined indolently in the other corner of the carriage, and closed her eyes also, not however to sleep, but to think more at her ease. In the meantime the king, seated in the front seat of his carriage, the back of which he had yielded up to the two queens, was a prey to that feverish contrariety experienced by anxious lovers, who, without being able to quench their ardent thirst, are ceaselessly desirous of seeing the loved object, and then go away partially satisfied, without perceiving they have acquired a more insatiable thirst than ever. The king, whose carriage headed the procession, could not from the place he occupied perceive the carriages of the ladies and maids of honor, which followed in a line behind it. Besides, he was obliged to answer the eternal questions of the young queen, who, happy to have with her "*her dear husband*," as she called him in utter forgetfulness of royal etiquette, invested him with all her affection, stifled him with her attentions, afraid that some one might come to take him from her, or that he himself might suddenly take a fancy to quit her society. Anne of Austria, whom nothing at that moment occupied except the occasional cruel throbbings in her bosom, looked pleased and delighted, and although she perfectly realized the king's impatience, tantalizingly prolonged his sufferings by unexpectedly resuming the conversation at the very moment the king, absorbed in his own reflections, began to muse over his secret attachment. Everything seemed to combine—not alone the little teasing attentions of the queen, but also the queen-mother's interruptions—to make the king's position almost insupportable; for he knew not how to control the restless longings of his heart. At first, he

complained of the heat—a complaint merely preliminary to others, but with sufficient tact to prevent Maria Theresa guessing his real object. Understanding the king's remark literally, she began to fan him with her ostrich plumes. But the heat passed away, and the king then complained of cramps and stiffness in his legs, and as the carriages at that moment stopped to change horses, the queen said:—"Shall I get out with you? I too feel tired of sitting. We can walk on a little distance; the carriage will overtake us, and we can resume our places presently."

The king frowned; it is a hard trial a jealous woman makes her husband submit to whose fidelity she suspects, when, although herself a prey to jealousy, she watches herself so narrowly that she avoids giving any pretext for an angry feeling. The king, therefore, in the present case, could not refuse; he accepted the offer, alighted from the carriage, gave his arm to the queen, and walked up and down with her while the horses were being changed. As he walked along, he cast an envious glance upon the courtiers, who were fortunate enough to be on horseback. The queen soon found out that the promenade she had suggested afforded the king as little pleasure as he had experienced from driving. She accordingly expressed a wish to return to her carriage, and the king conducted her to the door, but did not get in with her. He stepped back a few paces, and looked along the file of carriages for the purpose of recognizing the one in which he took so strong an interest. At the door of the sixth carriage he saw La Vallière's fair countenance. As the king thus stood motionless, wrapt in thought, without perceiving that everything was ready, and that he alone was causing the delay, he heard a voice close beside him, addressing him in the most respectful manner. It was M. Malicorne, in a complete costume of an equerry, hold-

ing over his left arm the bridles of a couple of horses.
"Your majesty asked for a horse, I believe," he said.

"A horse? Have you one of my horses here?" inquired the king, trying to remember the person who addressed him, and whose face was not as yet familiar to him.

"Sire," replied Malicorne, "at all events I have a horse here which is at your majesty's service."

And Malicorne pointed at Monsieur's bay horse, which Madame had observed. It was a beautiful creature royally caparisoned.

"This is not one of my horses, monsieur," said the king.

"Sire, it is a horse out of his royal highness's stables; but he does not ride when the weather is as hot as it is now."

Louis did not reply, but approached the horse, which stood pawing the ground with his foot. Malicorne hastened to hold the stirrup for him, but the king was already in the saddle. Restored to good-humor by this lucky accident, the king hastened towards the queen's carriage, where he was anxiously expected; and notwithstanding Maria-Theresa's thoughtful and preoccupied air, he said: "I have been fortunate enough to find this horse, and I intend to avail myself of it. I felt stifled in the carriage. Adieu, ladies."

Then bending gracefully over the arched neck of his beautiful steed, he disappeared in a second. Anne of Austria leaned forward, in order to look after him as he rode away; he did not get very far, for when he reached the sixth carriage, he reined in his horse suddenly and took off his hat. He saluted La Vallière, who uttered a cry of surprise as she saw him, blushing at the same time with pleasure. Montalais, who occupied the other seat in the carriage, made the king a most respectful bow. And,

then, with all the tact of a woman, she pretended to be exceedingly interested in the landscape, and withdrew herself into the left-hand corner. The conversation between the king and La Vallière began, as all lovers' conversations generally do, namely, by eloquent looks and by a few words utterly devoid of common-sense. The king explained how warm he had felt in his carriage, so much so indeed that he could almost regard the horse he then rode as a blessing thrown in his way. "And," he added, "my benefactor is an exceedingly intelligent man, for he seemed to guess my thoughts intuitively. I have now only one wish, that of learning the name of the gentleman who so cleverly assisted his king out of his dilemma, and extricated him from his cruel position."

Montalais, during this colloquy, the first words of which had awakened her attention, had slightly altered her position, and contrived so as to meet the king's look as he finished his remark. It followed very naturally that the king looked inquiringly as much at her as at La Vallière; she had every reason to suppose that it was herself who was appealed to, and consequently might be permitted to answer. She therefore said: "Sire, the horse which your majesty is riding belongs to Monsieur, and was being led by one of his royal highness's gentlemen."

"And what is that gentleman's name, may I ask, mademoiselle?"

"M. de Malicorne, sire."

The name produced its usual effect, for the king repeated it smilingly.

"Yes, sire," replied Aure. "Stay, it is the gentleman who is galloping on my left hand;" and she pointed out Malicorne, who, with a very sanctified expression, was galloping by the side of the carriage, knowing perfectly well that they were talking of him at that very moment, but sitting in his saddle as if he were deaf and dumb.

"Yes," said the king, "that is the gentleman; I remember his face, and will not forget his name;" and the king looked tenderly at La Vallière.

Aure had now nothing further to do; she had let Malicorne's name fall; the soil was good; all that was now left to be done was to let the name take root, and the event would bear fruit in due season. She consequently, threw herself back in her corner, feeling perfectly justified in making as many agreeable signs of recognition as she liked to Malicorne, since the latter had had the happiness of pleasing the king. As will readily be believed, Montalais was not mistaken; and Malicorne, with his quick ear and his sly look, seemed to interpret her remark as "All goes on well," the whole being accompanied by a pantomimic action, which he fancied conveyed something resembling a kiss.

"Alas! mademoiselle," said the king, after a moment's pause, "the liberty and freedom of the country is soon about to cease; your attendance on Madame will be more strictly enforced, and we shall see each other no more."

"Your majesty is too much attached to Madame," replied Louise, "not to come and see her very frequently; and whenever your majesty may chance to pass across the apartments——"

"Ah!" said the king, in a tender voice, which was gradually lowered in its tone, "to perceive is not to see, and yet it seems that it would be quite sufficient for you."

Louise did not answer a syllable; a sigh filled her heart almost to bursting, but she stifled it.

"You exercise a great control over yourself," said the king to Louise, who smiled upon him with a melancholy expression. "Exert the strength you have in loving fondly," he continued, "and I will bless Heaven for having bestowed it on you."

La Vallière still remained silent, but raised her eyes,

brimful of affection toward the king. Louis, as if overcome by this burning glance, passed his hand across his forehead, and pressing the sides of his horse with his knees made him bound several paces forward. La Vallière leaning back in her carriage, with her eyes half closed, gazed fixedly upon the king, whose plumes were floating in the air; she could not but admire his graceful carriage, his delicate and nervous limbs which pressed his horse's sides and the regular outline of his features, which his beautiful curling hair set off to great advantage, revealing occasionally his small and well-formed ear. In fact the poor girl was in love and she reveled in her innocent affection. In a few moments the king was again by her side.

"Do you not perceive," he said, "how terribly your silence affects me? Oh! mademoiselle, how pitilessly inexorable you would become if you were ever to resolve to break off all acquaintance with any one; and then, too, I think you changeable; in fact—in fact, I dread this deep affection which fills my whole being."

"Oh! sire, you are mistaken," said Vallière; "if ever I love, it will be for all my life."

"If you love, you say," exclaimed the king; "you do *not* love now, then?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"You see," said the king, "that I am right in accusing you; you must admit that you are changeable, capricious, a coquette, perhaps."

"Oh, no! sire, be perfectly satisfied as to that. No, I say again; no, no!"

"Promise me, then, that to me you will always be the same."

"Oh! always, sire."

"That you will never show any of that severity which would break my heart, none of that fickleness of manner which would be worse than death to me."

"Oh! no, no."

"Very well, then! but listen. I like promises, I like to place under the guarantee of an oath, under the protection of Heaven in fact, everything which interests my heart and my affections. Promise me, or rather swear to me that if in the life we are about to commence, a life which will be full of sacrifice, mystery, anxiety, disappointment and misunderstanding; swear to me that if we should in any way deceive, or misunderstand each other, or should judge each other unjustly, for that indeed would be criminal in love such as ours; swear to me, Louise—"

She trembled with agitation to the very depths of her heart; it was the first time she had heard her name pronounced in that manner by her royal lover. As for the king, taking off his glove, and placing his hand within the carriage, he continued:—"Swear, that never in all our quarrels will we allow one night even to pass by, if any misunderstanding should arise between us, without a visit, or at least a message, from either, in order to convey consolation and repose to the other."

La Vallière took her lover's burning hand between her own cool palms, and pressed it softly, until a movement of the horse, frightened by the proximity of the wheels obliged her to abandon her happiness. She had vowed as he desired.

"Return, sire," she said, "return to the queen. I foresee a storm yonder, which threatens my peace of mind and yours."

Louis obeyed, saluted Mademoiselle de Montalais, and set off at a gallop to rejoin the queen. As he passed Monsieur's carriage, he observed that he was fast asleep, although Madame, on her part, was wide awake. As the king passed her she said, "What a beautiful horse, sire! Is it not Monsieur's bay horse?"

The young queen kindly asked, "Are you better now sire?"